

weekly  
**worker**



**Ukraine's surprise attack on the Kursk oblast is a humiliation for Putin and the pro-Kremlin left**

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# AFTER THE RIOTS



# LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

## Trans liberation

Jack Conrad's response to my letter the previous week, despite coming from a writer I usually hold in such high regard, is a deeply disappointing and a slightly stereotypical response (Letters, August 1).

I did note the brief reference in the CPGB *Draft programme* to support for trans liberation, yet actually looking through the demands raised reveals nothing that even vaguely relates to us. I cannot emphasise and clarify this enough: while gay and trans liberation are deeply intertwined, there are arenas where they are fundamentally separate and must be dealt with as such. So, in the spirit of following Jack Conrad's comradely advice to look at what *is* in the *Draft programme*, I will engage in a brief exercise of reading through the demands so carefully laid out by him.

The preamble of this section is entirely correct: we have been historically used as scapegoats and forced into the paradigms of capitalist gender. Yet the problem emerges with the closing line: "The working class needs to be mobilised in order to defend and advance sexual freedom." Absolutely, yet here comes the problem: trans rights are not "sexual freedom": they are an entirely separate issue. My right to have sordid affairs with other women or marry the woman I love is in no way related to the basic right to get on hormones and transition (which I thankfully am after a four-year struggle).

Looking through the explicit demands of the CPGB's *Draft programme*, my statement that you fundamentally fail to address trans issues rings true once more. In the spirit of honesty I will go through each of the demands and critique them in this manner, though in purely political terms I fully support them.

■ Decriminalisation of all consensual sexual practices. End police and state harassment.

A vital step forward, yet once again who I engage with in sordid affairs is not related to the hormones I'm taking or the medical access to surgery (unless we consider sexual practices or state harassment to cover sexual reassignment surgery, which is a novel definition).

■ Lesbian women and gay men should be accorded the same rights in society as heterosexuals: that is, state marriages, artificial insemination for lesbians, adoption and fostering. No discrimination in custody cases on the grounds of sexual orientation.

Once again as outlined, the women I marry does not impact my medical transition. I will, however, concede that the support for fertility treatment benefits trans people, and as such I rescind my criticism of this arena. I do try to be a reasonable woman.

■ No discrimination in any area of employment.

I concede this in turn to the CPGB: this will benefit many trans people, as cultural barriers and institutionalised transphobia make the job market a deeply complex and scary arena to wade through.

■ Decriminalisation of prostitution, so as to remove it from criminal control.

■ For the self-organisation of prostitutes to improve their conditions. Prostitutes to be provided with special healthcare and other services to reduce the dangers they confront. Measures must be put in place to give prostitutes wider social opportunities.

These two demands are vital. A high proportion of trans people are involved in the sex industry, and their protection is vital and necessary. The defence of sex workers must rest upon their power, as must the defence of all workers.

Yet once again the glaring problem remains, for all that Jack Conrad claims the *Draft programme* is filled with "opposition to discrimination" and "championing of freedom", the question that I find myself running head-first into, much like the realisation that I am a woman many years ago, is very simple: What about freedom from discrimination in the medical field, where hormones are gate-kept, and our basic rights denied to us?

What about the freedom for the medical and economic rights that are necessary for us to fulfil the aim of communism and transform us into complete human beings (even if in a perhaps more literal sense than amongst our cis comrades)? Communists know well that claims of freedom mean nothing if not paired with concrete material action, yet where is the step forward for these actions, in this field? It is not within the *Draft programme* where it would make the most sense. It could just take the form of an insertion of a simple paragraph or even a sentence.

It is not within the resolutions or theses issued by the CPGB. As far as I can tell it is in thin air - or somewhere in the scattered editions of the *Weekly Worker*. This paper is a vital publication, but, when such a question is scattered across issues for decades, one can hardly find a clear and concise road forward.

If comrades are interested in continuing this debate or engaging with the work of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation in Australia, I would heartily recommend they submit a letter to the RCO's *The Partisan* at [partisanmagazine@proton.me](mailto:partisanmagazine@proton.me). We look forward to the debates.

**Brunhilda O**  
email

## Biblical quotes

If I were to write a very lengthy article for the *Weekly Worker* which purported to set out the ideological bases of modern-day Nazis and did so through very lengthy quotations from, say, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* over the two pages, I suspect very many readers would smell a very large rat.

I might be accused of, while purporting to be anti-Nazi, surreptitiously smuggling large amounts of Nazi quotes into the *Weekly Worker* for my own private gratification and also providing gratification for any actual Nazis reading it (hopefully, not likely). They might suggest the *Weekly Worker* was guilty at the very least of bad taste in carrying so many objectionable quotes.

Yet Moshé Machover, an Israeli, in the name of trying to expose the ideological bases underpinning modern-day Zionism, uses his two-page article to extensively quote blood-curdling and horrifying passages from the Old Testament advocating mass murder and mass destruction of non-Jewish peoples ('Promise myth as template', July 25).

I am sure any modern-day Zionist who not only supports the state of Israel, but also the genocidal policies and actions of that state against the Palestinian people, would be very pleased to read such extensive biblical passages apparently justifying the existence of the Jewish state and its inherent genocidal nature. I am sure Mr Machover is very proud of his latest 'achievement'.

I have previously asked, to no avail, if you are going to carry analytical articles on Palestine, why not "from the *Palestinian* perspective and, ideally, from those within the secular, Marxist, communist traditions within the *Palestinian* resistance and national liberation movement, of which there are vast quantities of material available. This would be much more in line with the *Weekly Worker's* stated aims of being in favour of Marxism, national liberation and socialism, and an international communist movement" (Letters, May 9).

Relying on Tony Greenstein and Machover as your 'house experts' on Palestine is completely bizarre. Greenstein is an appalling individual with appalling views - including the destruction of the Israeli people and nation - and most definitely not a Marxist in any shape or form, and, with such views, no socialist either.

Machover has a very specific sectarian history, displays far too much arrogance in his intellectualism to be a good Marxist or a communist, has complete contempt for the ability of the *Palestinian* people to liberate themselves, advocating instead some form of mythical ultra-left regional socialist revolution to liberate the poor *Palestinians* and to be able to offer something tangible enough to satisfy the needs and interests of the *Israeli* working class.

One can't help but notice in both Machover's and the *Weekly Worker's* schema for the socialist revolution across Arabia, the *Israeli* working class has a unique, privileged position. It can choose to remain aloof from a socialist Arabia or, if the deal is attractive enough for them as a class, it might choose to join in. Funny that.

So, why no *Palestinian* Marxist voice in the *Weekly Worker*? Do you not know of any? Not know how to contact such writers? Or are you just simply not interested in hearing and publishing the *Palestinian* perspective?

Just in case anyone wants to throw around the anti-Semitism label, I am not criticising the use of Greenstein and Machover as sole authors on *Israel/Palestine* because they are Jewish. I believe every people and every individual should have the right to hold and celebrate any religious views they may have - providing, of course, the rights to life and the safety of others are not impinged - and any national or religious cultures they may have. This includes all Jewish people, who must never be subject to discrimination or hostility anywhere they live and work in the world.

I think in the recent debates and discussions carried in the *Weekly Worker*, the views and analyses put forward by Steve Freeman are by far the most acceptable, and, contrary to the introduction to one of his articles ('Marching towards what solution?' May 16), are very much in the Bolshevik tradition and that of the Communist International.

Freeman in that article and elsewhere references Moshé Machover's correct call for three basic conditions for a just and equitable settlement in the Middle East: equal and comprehensive rights for all individuals living in the Mandate *Palestine* region; equal national rights for the *Palestinian* and *Israeli* peoples; and the right of return for all *Palestinian* refugees and their descendants. Machover then, of course, veers off straight into his ultra-leftist 'solution' of an Arabia-wide socialist revolution, putting off any form of liberation for decades, if not forever. Funny that - Freeman incorporates these minimum demands into his specific schema for

a federal republic for the *Palestine/Israel* region.

I think whether any remotely acceptable solution to the *Palestine/Israel* conflict includes one state or two, federal or centralised, or the degree to which any successor state(s) are able to transcend purely bourgeois categories and move towards socialism, will, as always, depend on class and democratic struggles by the working masses in the region, and their outcomes. Their outcomes and direction will be specifically influenced by the extent they can be led by genuinely secular and Marxist-Leninist currents and formations, especially within the *Palestinian* resistance and national liberation movement. It would be good to see the *Weekly Worker* on the side of these.

It is not for people living in Britain - the original colonial and imperialist power - to prescribe specific state configurations or constitutional outcomes for the peoples engaged in struggle for their national liberation, for democracy and equal rights, and, ideally, for socialism.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## Mind-controlled

While, unlike John Smithee, I don't support the ultra-left position of opposing all immigration controls, if Smithee is right about George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain calling for the sinking of boats carrying illegal immigrants by the Royal Navy, this would make Galloway's party a fascist 'workers' party' (Letters, August 1) Communists would be wrong to call for electoral support for such a party and needlessly splitting the Labour vote.

This also raises again the whole question of the correct attitude of communists. Many with sectarian positions frequently claim that the working class needs to form its own party, when it has already done so. In Britain it's called the Labour Party. There is no need to form another party of the working class in Britain, as the sects have been trying to do for years. The classic example of which is the Revolutionary Communist Group - and more recently the new RCP.

The fact that the working class party in Britain is presently led by mostly rightwing people isn't a reason to adopt the sectarian platform that workers need to form a new party. Those communists who have this sectarian position should be consistent and call on the working class to form new, pure trade unions under leftwing leadership. Calling for a new workers' party is no less absurd, when one already exists. It would be like the Bolsheviks in 1917 calling for setting up new soviets because the ones which already exist are led by the rightwing Mensheviks ...

The task for the left is not the formation of a new workers' or communist party, which in British conditions is to indulge in sectarian politics - as Lenin recognised when he told communists to join the Labour Party. The task of the British left is to win Labour over to democratic socialism, as part of the process of winning the masses over to socialism. The same process - which would facilitate the growth of a mass communist party in Britain - is identical to the process which would facilitate winning Labour over to democratic socialism. Some communists have correctly rejected the sectarian position on Labour, but still retain the sectarian line that the task is to win it over to 'Marxism' instead of democratic socialism.

To those who don't grasp how the British revolutionary process

will play out, this may seem like I am preaching auto-Labour loyalism. But it's really the recognition that the British road to socialism leads to the demise of the Labour party right wing. The danger to the working class in Britain isn't the Labour right. The real danger is ultra-left sectarianism.

We face two main tasks today: winning people over to democratic socialism; and building up anti-fascist unity, while exposing the counterrevolutionary, racist narrative of the right.

Finally, I would like to say a few things about the Southport stabbings. The incident has the fingerprint of the deep state all over it, especially coming within weeks of a Labour landslide win in the recent elections. Those who are aware of the deep state and how it operates would have recognised the fingerprint immediately. These types of apparently random killings usually happen in the US, where the deep state has been doing this more often.

They use mind-controlled individuals to carry out assassinations, or random shootings to promote a particular agenda: for instance, the introduction of more anti-terrorist legislation, giving the police more powers, removing a political opponent, and so on. The mind-controlled stooges are then portrayed as weird, or loners, but these hapless individuals would have no clue why they carried out the crime they did. Likewise, the general public will have no clue that the deep state was behind it, nor will the police and most politicians. Researchers have shown something we need to be aware of: the deep state has an army of mind-controlled individuals, which it uses to do its bidding to achieve a certain agenda.

**Tony Clark**  
For Democratic Socialism

## Dog shit

Comrades from the *Weekly Worker/CPGB* have been at Communist University 2024 discussing all things ideological around the defeat of capitalism - maybe somewhat paradoxically, whilst its global elites continued developing ideas around the annihilation of any intentions in that revolutionary direction. They turn a blind eye to the intrinsic oppression, persecutions and even *slaughter* of a remainder of the world's workers/toilers for the benefits made available to themselves.

But, hey, what's not to like about capitalism? Certainly not when irresistibly spanking new 'eco-friendly' electric vehicles are there to be plugged in to dubiously renewable energy sources, before setting out on to jam-packed highways for hours alongside of a million courier vans delivering absolute shite for Amazon (amongst other such hideously planet-annihilating outfits). That's, of course, assuming those motorway-blocking Just Stop Oil protestors won't continue to behave with such 'fanatical' lack of consideration for the general public - or alternatively have been freed from serving those five-to-seven-year jail sentences.

By the way, I'm sorry not to have been at CU 2024 due to nowadays being obliged to treat my body with extra care as a result of ageing. The readers, supporters and members of the *WW/CPGB* may be egregiously isolated, but are authentic futurists - in stark distinction to those aesthetico-cultural *traitors* out there.

Sometimes I think I'd prefer to eat dog-shit sandwiches than to accept as 'normal' this current era in history, where a large section of citizens don't seem to see things in that way.

**Bruno Kretzschmar**  
email



FRANCE

# At an impasse

Paul Russell looks at the extraordinary difficulties in finding a prime minister who can command a workable majority. However, Marine Le Pen's National Rally seems quite content to bide its time till the 2027 presidential election



PCF: calling for Sixth Republic

Unanimity never lasts long in politics. Having requested, and obtained, a truce among deputies in the Assemblée Nationale over the thorny question of choosing a new prime minister, with the afterglow of the Olympics fading fast, Emmanuel Macron is being challenged anew.

Following the car-crash result of the president's sudden call for a general election - one in which Macron hoped the electorate would see sense and return his right-of-centre party (renamed Renaissance) much strengthened - the results could hardly be worse from his point of view. The left union, the New Popular Front (NFP) of socialists, communists, greens and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed (LFI), increased its seat total compared to the outgoing assembly, meaning that Renaissance slipped to second place. Previously, when it was called En Marche and then Ensemble, it had dominated the assembly with an absolute majority, but as a result of the June 30-July 7 elections, it lost that majority to NFP. Third place went to Marine Le Pen's National Rally (NR) after an unexpected drop of support, but, as in every previous election, it increased its number of deputies nevertheless.

## Caretaker

After the elections Gabriel Attal, Macron's prime minister, tendered his resignation, but Macron insisted he stay on as caretaker. Is there some urgency and could the Assemblée Nationale muddle along bill by bill? Well, a fiscal deadline looms and France is carrying a heavy debt. A draft finance bill for 2025 must be presented to parliament by October 1, and before that the European Commission awaits France's proposals for dealing with its excessive deficit.

Because it is the largest party in the legislature, the NFP claims the right to put forward a candidate for prime minister from its own ranks. It has proposed Lucie Castets, a member of the Socialist Party.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the general election, Castets was unknown - an economist and technocrat in the civil service. Although affiliated with the Socialist Party, she has kept her distance following disagreements with François Hollande, when he was president. Possibly Mélenchon's backing (needed because he has the largest number of deputies in the

NFP) stems from this gap between Hollande and her.

Macron is proposing a pact with six objectives, including the defence of secularism. This is a highly inflammatory subject, even within the NFP, whose parties hold highly divergent views. In its programme for the legislative elections, Renaissance and the Macronists declared that they wanted to reaffirm secularism "against the battering rams of Islamists and extremists". Recalling the ban on wearing the abaya (an overgarment worn by women from the shoulders to the feet) decided in September 2023 and denounced by part of the left, Macron promised to fight "for secularism in all our public services".

This aim was shared by most of the deputies of the Republicans (LR), heirs to the Gaullist party of yesteryear, except for a rump, headed by their chair, Eric Ciotti, who had called for an electoral alliance with National Rally. LR expelled Ciotti, but on the same day a court found in his favour and he was reinstated, to the fury of rank-and-file LR members.

There might also be some common ground on the reform of state institutions. Since its earliest incarnation, Mélenchon and LFI have been calling for a "Sixth Republic", with greatly diminished presidential powers. Although Macron does not like it, several of his deputies are keen to move closer to this project.

Within the NFP, there are different tactical pacts around issues such as the environment and nuclear energy, where the left holds differing opinions, even within its constituent parts. And, of course, the NFP views on questions such as defence and taxation are completely different from those on the right; all of which means that for the moment, there is no consensual arrangement in sight.

Renaissance is still of the view that deputies can be peeled off from the NFP, who, along with those from some of the minor parties, will be sufficient to force through legislation on a case-by-case basis, while keeping out the NR and NFP. When Lucie Castets was nominated, Macron suggested she disengage from the NFP; she refused.

President Macron might be experiencing a certain malicious pleasure in watching the parties compete for the key role of prime minister, but time is pressing. Gabriel Attal, France's youngest prime minister and the second

shortest in office, is preparing the grounds of his departure with two objectives in mind. First, it appears that he is contemplating disengaging Renaissance from Macron and reinvigorating its dispirited deputies by placing the party at arm's length from the president.<sup>2</sup> Second and looking further ahead, he has his eye on the presidency itself, when the next election rolls around in 2027.

## Summoned

Macron has summoned the heads of parties and political groups to a roundtable at the Elysée palace, (equivalent to 10 Downing Street) on August 23, to allow the president to decide who among them he would nominate as prime minister. Macron still hopes to find a majority in the Assemblée Nationale to support him. For the time being, two names are circulating in the presidential party: Bernard Cazeneuve and Xavier Bertrand, a figure despised by the left. More than ever, a political impasse seems increasingly likely. While Macron struggles to appoint a prime minister and complete his mandate, LR and NR do not want to get involved. The NFP is being pushed by its voters to assume the governing role, but does not have the parliamentary means.

No-one is happy with this situation - except perhaps NR, which is biding its time, and LR, which is hoping to rebuild. LR has no interest in participating in any coalition with Macron, who is widely regarded as a lame duck. Everything is blocked on the left as well as the right ●

## Notes

1. On LFI's website, the candidate is presented as "Madame Lucie Castets"! True, French is a more formal language than English, but one fairly recent change is that official communications do not refer to 'Mademoiselle' (Miss) any longer: all women are now addressed as 'Madame'. But the LFI betrays its 'moderate' alignment on its membership application page, where readers are addressed using the formal 'vous' for 'you', whereas a similar page from the Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français) uses the informal 'tu'. That has been customary in communist parties everywhere where formal and informal modes of address are part of the language.

2. Long gone are the halcyon days of Macron's first election as president, when his party secured an absolute majority in the assembly and each deputy was required to sign an oath of allegiance, swearing to vote according to Macron's wishes. A great many of these deputies had never seen so much as the inside of a municipal town hall meeting. They complied meekly until subsequent elections proved that they were at risk of losing their seats for such fealty.

## ACTION

### No more F-35s for genocide

**Saturday August 24, 1pm:** North-west regional protest outside BAE Systems, Samlesbury Aerodrome, Myerscough Road, Blackburn BB2. Demand an end to the production of parts for F-35 fighter jets, used in devastating airstrikes on Gaza and Yemen. Organised by Blackburn4Palestine: caat.org.uk/events/bac-f35-northwest-demo.

### Remember Burston Strike School

**Sunday September 1, 10.30am to 4pm:** Rally, Diss Road, Burston, Norfolk IP22. Commemorate the longest strike in history. Free entry. Organised by Unite the Union and the TUC: burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com/2024-rally.

### Lenin as an economist

**Sunday September 1, 3pm:** Online talk presented by Michael Roberts, Marxist economist and author. Part of a series commemorating 100 years since Lenin's death. Registration free. Organised by Lenin 100 in Britain: eventbrite.co.uk/e/lenin-as-an-economist-tickets-891004647887.

### Wigan Diggers festival

**Saturday September 7, 11.15am to 9.30pm:** Open-air, free festival, The Wind, Wigan WN1. Commemorating Gerrard Winstanley and the 17th century Diggers movement with music and political stalls. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: www.facebook.com/events/493278123654982.

### End the genocide - stop arming Israel

**Saturday September 7, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble central London, venue tbc. Demand the government immediately ends all complicity in Israel's violence and apartheid and pushes for a permanent ceasefire now. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/palestinesolidarityuk.

### Stand up for choice

**Saturday September 7, time tbc:** Counter-protest. Assemble at the Millicent Fawcett statue, Parliament Square, London SW1. Oppose anti-abortion groups and stand up for the right to choose. Organised by Abortion Rights: www.facebook.com/Abortionrightsuk.

### Join the fight for a workers' manifesto

**Sunday September 8, 1pm:** TUC rally, Old Ship Hotel, 32-38 Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Demand the new government enacts pro-worker policies. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork.

### War, peace and Palestine - trade union issues

**Monday September 9, 6.30pm:** TUC fringe meeting, Friends House, Ship Street, Brighton BN1. British-made bombs rain down on Gaza, while the Ukraine military is equipped with British-made arms. Ordinary people pay with their lives. Labour is raising arms spending in line with the Tory plans. Workers need welfare, not warfare. Speakers include Fran Heathcote (PCS) and Alex Gordon (RMT). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

### Peace and Justice international conference

**Saturday September 14, 10am:** Conference, Blizzard Building, Queen Mary University of London, 4 Newark Street, London E1. Politicians, union leaders, academics and activists discuss solutions to global injustice, inequality and conflict. Registration £23 (£11.50). Organised by Peace and Justice Project: www.facebook.com/TheCorbynProject/videos/1127055275024908.

### Women chainmakers festival

**Sunday September 15, 11am to 5.30pm:** Family festival, Mary McArthur Gardens, Cradley Heath B64. Celebrate the 1910 women chainmakers' victorious 10-week strike against starvation wages. Entrance free. Organised by TUC Midlands: www.womenchainmakers.org.uk/events.

### The long depression and the tepid 20s

**Wednesday September 18, 7pm:** Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker Michael Roberts examines the IMF forecast that the major economies are stuck in stagnation. Registration £7 (£4). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/473.

### From revolving door to open-plan office

**Wednesday September 18, 7pm:** Online and onsite report launch, 4th Floor Studios, 255 Commercial Road, Whitechapel, London E1. Exposing the ever-closer union between the UK government and the arms industry. This assures top arms companies a stream of lucrative MOD contracts and a highly permissive arms export regime, including sales to Saudi Arabia and Israel. Registration free. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/report-launch-open-plan-office.

### The racket

**Wednesday September 18, 7pm:** Book event, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Declassified UK journalist Matt Kennard introduces his book, *The racket: a rogue reporter vs the American empire*. Followed by Q and A. Tickets £3 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

### Labour Party conference Palestine protest

**Saturday September 21, 12 noon:** Liverpool protest, venue tbc. Call on the government to push for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and immediately end its support for apartheid Israel's genocide. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

### CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.



## FAR RIGHT



Taking the lead ... but with backward politics

# After the riots

Racist violence erupted in almost every part of Britain. We need a better response than liberal hand-wringing and blinkered economism, argues **Paul Demarty**

**F**or a week or so beginning on July 30, as readers will be aware, cities in Britain and Northern Ireland became the scene of racist rioting.

The formal inciting incident was the stabbing of several children and teachers at a dance class in Southport on Merseyside by a teenager, Axel Rudakubana. His identity was not released, being under the age of 18, and his motive remains unclear; on the evidence of many such outrages over the Atlantic, the conventional quest for a motive may be onto a loser anyway. The way was open for opportunists to fill this void with their own story: that this was the act of a Muslim asylum-seeker, who had come over on one of the hated small boats. Far-right demagogues put together protests, which rapidly spiralled into orgiastic pogroms.

The resulting scenes were not pretty. Organised assaults were directed at hotels housing asylum-seekers. Racist crews assaulted people thought to be vaguely Muslim-looking, and before long anyone in the wrong place at the wrong time who was not white. Several buildings were torched, including a citizen's advice bureau in Sunderland. Looting inevitably followed: much mockery was directed at the sight of a rioter 'liberating' a tray of sausage rolls from Greggs, and even some luxury bath bombs from Lush were purloined in the name of "taking our country back". As the arrests piled up, and the energy started to leak out of the mobs, they began to be outnumbered by both police and anti-racist counter-protestors, and things fizzled out, as they always do.

So, for a couple of weeks, we have been conducting the traditional national post-mortem. Part of that, of course, has involved mass arrests and the most rapid prosecution of the rioters. The other, more substantial part has been the interpretation of

events, which - in the bourgeois sphere - has come in several different layers, each dependent on slightly silly special pleading, and each subject to contestation.

### Interpretations

The most basic interpretation possible is that of 'law and order' - the people involved were simply thugs and criminals, and a proper response amounts to 'rounding up the usual suspects'. By August 5, even the *Daily Mail*, whose output has been an endless tissue of semi-fictional immigrant crime stories for as long as anyone can remember, hailed counterprotests as a triumph of decency over thuggery.

Of course, there is some truth to that. Whatever else these events were, they were carnivals of criminal violence. For some of those arrested, it was far from their first rodeo. Some wider attention was paid to the trial of two men arrested for disorder in Plymouth. One had complained in his police interview of the use of "taxpayers' money" to "keep these people [presumably immigrants] in the country after committing such heinous crimes". The judge, in summing up, pointed out that this gentleman had racked up no less than 170 criminal convictions in his life, at no small cost to the exchequer, and might want to bear that in mind next time he riots in defence of British taxpayers. I have been told by mental health professionals down this way that, of the five men arrested in this riot (one counterprotestor was also nicked), four are "clients", as they now call them, of the NHS mental health apparatus. These are not well-adjusted people.

How representative such men are of the overall mass is hard to discern. Many more participated than were arrested; they contributed to the overall atmosphere of terror and intimidation without looting, assaulting people or fighting the

cops. Though the various fascist sects - Britain First, Atomwaffen and friends - participated, so did many other people of no known formal political affiliation. The willingness of more 'respectable' figures on the right, like Robert Jenrick or Matthew Goodwin, to insist that people's "legitimate grievances" should not be swept away by revulsion at the violent excesses of the rioters is notable. Exactly how the tissue of straightforward falsehoods that immediately occasioned the disorder could possibly constitute a "legitimate grievance" is not clear.

### Palestine

There is also the complaint that these outrages on the right are treated more severely than leftwing protests - presumably having in mind the recent mass demonstrations in solidarity with Palestine, which the rightwing hive-mind has convinced itself amount to "hate marches". If they are unable to accept that the Palestine demos are almost entirely peaceful, however, it seems at least that the cops are aware that it is a safer deployment than anything put together by Tommy Robinson. The police casualty list of the recent riots: 130-plus officers injured, plus seven dogs, and one horse. The police casualty list of nearly a year of Palestine marches: zero. A more obvious comparator would be the 2011 riots after the police shooting of Mark Duggan, which caused a similar level of harm to the boys, girls and horses in blue, and resulted in three times as many arrests. The Director of Public Prosecutions at the time? "Two-tier Keir" Starmer.

Beyond the basic 'thug rampage' interpretation of these events, there is the "disinformation" explanation. This at least has the virtue of accepting that *some* account is necessary of the motives of the rioters that is not merely apologetic, and of taking seriously

the regrettable circumstance that so much lively terror was spread in enraged response to straightforward fiction. It has the vice of merely falling back on the stalest clichés of the Anglo-American political establishment - that this is all the work of outside agitators, whether in the form of demagogues outside the pale of official British politics, like Robinson - who enjoyed the spectacle from the safety of Cyprus, in hiding from charges of contempt of court - or Andrew Tate, or the subversive activities of adversary states.

We are subjected to no end of risible accusations that this was all a matter of those dastardly "Russian botnets", that it was all Kremlin 'active measures' (like Trump, like Brexit, like every other inconvenience to afflict the political class). No real evidence has been offered for this, any more than all the other just-so stories about Vladimir Putin puppet-mastering global reaction. If anything of the sort can be claimed accurately, paranoid liberals - and miserable pseudo-left outriders like Paul Mason - ought to look in the other direction. Most of the amplification of the preposterous stories circulating after the Southport stabbings took place in that indispensable nation that is the United States, most notoriously in the person of Elon Musk, the boss of the website formerly known as Twitter, whose remaining anchors to reality are coming loose one after the other.

British far-right agitators are in far more regular communication with their US allies, with whom they share a common language and a large fund of common grievances. The hated "woke mind virus" spread out from America, and so does the polymorphously perverse resistance to it. Official political society in this country can no more understand these political pathologies as all-

American than it can see them as truly British. Aren't we supposed to be the freedom-loving ones? Are we the bad guys?

As a result, the clearest political lead from the government on where to go next is merely ... *more* speech controls, *more* censorship of social media, a stronger Online Safety Act. Musk has raised a hypocritical hue and cry over this, although the fact that he himself participated in the hysteria that led to mass violence has rather blunted his cutting edge on this point. It would nonetheless be another notch on the ratchet of online speech-policing, and the Russian angle is helpful here: what is fundamentally going on with state interference in internet media is inter-state competition. A wave of pogromist violence is a crisis that simply cannot be let go to waste.

### Left response

How then *is* all this chaos to be understood? The left has responded in a number of ways. It is no surprise that the counterprotests are largely organised under the umbrella of the Socialist Workers Party's Stand Up To Racism front, which is ever ready to spring into action. Given our long-standing criticisms of the SWP/SUTR brand of anti-racism, we should say that these clearly played a useful role in shifting the momentum.

Large, well-organised counterprotests - apart from anything else - occupied space that could not be easily ravaged by racist rioters, in this respect functioning (though they would not want it put this way) as police auxiliaries. Indeed, they were even thanked by Metropolitan Police commissioner Mark Rowley. The worst chaos, certainly, was inflicted before the counterprotests were fully organised.

These activists were brave to step into a situation that clearly carried real physical threat, in some cases



physically defending hotels and mosques under attack by frenzied goons, and can be assured that they made an important difference.

For the SWP, this is proof of the correctness of their strategy and analysis. As Charlie Kimber put it on August 7,

If you have official politics saturated with racism, scapegoating and officially-sanctioned Islamophobia, then this will feed the far right and incubate a fascist core. Violent racists will say that politicians claim to be concerned about the scale of migration and the behaviour of Islamists. But they do nothing effective about it. So the far right must solve these matters through their own actions. It's no pleasure to say we were right, and in many ways we now face the most threatening fascist challenge for a century.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to place some of the blame on neoliberalism, dated in his account from the mid-1970s, which has seen the main parties fail to offer "significant improvements in working class people's lives", in favour of "austerity and cuts". Anti-migrant sentiment, Islamophobia and racism are offered as a deflection from "the fury about gross inequality and fantastic elite privilege".

A similar tack is taken by Claudia Webbe, the former Labour MP, in the *Morning Star*: she argues, on the basis of impressionistic usage of Umberto Eco, of all people, that the British state is already semi-fascist (meeting nine of Eco's 14 criteria), and concludes that we must

... get across the message that what matters is our class solidarity and that this, regardless of skin colour or faith, is what can affect the change that millions need to see in our country ... If we unite around this message and refuse to be diverted from it, we can win the arguments on race, on the structure of our society, on austerity, on justice - and against fascism. More people than ever are waking up to them. Fascism is an existential threat to decency and justice - but a united left movement of 'the many' can and will defeat it.<sup>2</sup>

The austerity angle is the main one pursued by the Socialist Party in England and Wales, whose paper carried the front-page headline, "Jobs, homes and services for all! Smash racism!" The short accompanying article, by SPEW national committee member Nick Chaffey, is very much on this theme: "The Socialist Party calls for a united working class fight for jobs, homes and public services for all, against racist division. We live in the world's sixth richest country. The money is there; we need to fight for it."<sup>3</sup>

Such economism is given short shrift by Richard Seymour, writing on the *New Left Review*'s frequently interesting *Sidecar* blog:

The left often has its own comforting narrative in which plebeian racist violence is a distorted expression of 'material interests'. This usually translates as a call to focus on 'bread and butter issues' rather than 'identity politics': as though we could route around the perplexing passions elicited by race and ethnicity by offering jobs and wages. No doubt we need more bread and butter, but that is strictly orthogonal to what is taking place. Racism sometimes works as a form of displaced or distorted class politics, but not always ... Those drawn to this

ethnonationalist politics steadfastly refuse to be particularly poor or marginalised. They may have experienced relative class decline or inhabit declining regions, but they are as likely to be middle class as workers. Racism does not so much express misplaced class grievance as organise the toxic emotions of failure, humiliation and decline.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, we can cite a reply to Seymour in the same venue, by historian and political theorist Anton Jäger, who is wary of throwing out the economic baby with the economistic bathwater:

Granted, the riots are no twisted expression of 'material interests'. But this should not lead us into a form of superstructuralism that represses the economic roots of the current crisis. The word 'austerity' does not appear in Seymour's piece; 'region' features only once, even though practically all the riots took place in areas hit hard by Cameron's cutbacks ... To understand the flammable situation at which the pyromaniac far right has taken aim, we need less mass psychology and more political economy.<sup>5</sup>

Jäger notes the importance of inward migration to the British economy (already the background to Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" rhetoric half a century ago, and certainly true today), with large numbers of legal migrants necessary to keep essential services running. The result is "an economy dependent on cheap labour for its meagre growth rates, unable to deliver meaningful productivity, with a population that increasingly wants the state to mount some kind of systemic intervention." He agrees with Seymour that "there is no repressed emancipatory core to the riots, no 'energy' which can be recuperated ... But beneath British pogromism still lies a universe of misery which it is the left's historic task to negate."

### Cable Street

Jäger in this respect ends up closer to Kimber and the SWP than either Seymour or SPEW, though he is more cautious on the usefulness of "A-to-B marches". Oddly perhaps for a historian, his history of the problem begins, at the earliest, with Powell, and really with Cameron. Much the same could be said for Kimber's placing of the riots in the context of neoliberalism. True enough, but these are hardly the first such events. Many have called back to the battle of Cable Street, as well they might; but one could mention riots targeted at Irish immigrants in the 18th and 19th centuries (also carriers of what was then considered a hostile and alien religion ... ), or even Tory pogroms against Huguenot refugees in the century before that.

The more immediate determinations matter, of course, but Marxists do not stop there. There is clearly something in the whole package of capitalist society that gives rise to these outrages.

First of all, the strength of the working class is directly - or even exponentially - proportional to its unity. A strike cannot succeed if too many people scab. Cooperatives can only succeed with large-scale buy-in from the workers at large. There is thus a bourgeois interest in cultivating divisions among the workers, on racial or ethnic or religious lines, or between gay and straight people, and so on. Propaganda in this direction is inevitably addressed to the whole society, however, and so subaltern sections of the dominant classes and

the petty bourgeoisie also suffer, and dominant sections thrive.

This leads us to, secondly, the persistence of the petty bourgeoisie - in spite of fundamental economic trends towards its elimination - in which respect it forms a distinct political resource within the *plebs*. The bourgeoisie proper, after all, is small. It needs leverage among the popular classes, and the interest of the petty bourgeoisie in its property makes it winnable (though its precarity also makes it a potential target for hegemony under working class leadership). (The rumour that the Southport murderer was a small-boat person has been traced to a certain Bernadette Spofforth, a small business owner; analogous class positions can be assigned to those demagogues Seymour delightfully terms the "lumpencommentariat".)

Thirdly, capitalism demands a military-bureaucratic state, and indeed inevitably produces competition between states. Seymour distinguishes the motives of the current disorder, of protecting the nation-state from outside interlopers, from an earlier imperial racism directed at the preservation of Britain's global dominance. Yet both are ways of improving or protecting Britain's position in the world *relative* to other states. They respond to the same fundamental dynamics of the capitalist world order, at different stages of British ascent and decline.

The interest of the working class in collective strength drives it to organise - both in immediate defence of its conditions of life, in trade unions or cooperatives, and ultimately in political organisation, for at the very least a seat at the top table, and, in the organisations of the revolutionary workers' movement, for democratic rule of society as a whole. The pursuit of these aims through collective strength produces social institutions that include broad masses in activity, and from there a distinctive culture and ideological landscape.

Mass-membership political parties representing *other* classes and class alliances largely emerge in response to this political challenge, transforming existing mechanisms of political rule: for instance, the 'club'-based structure of the old Tory and Whig parties in this country, but also in continental Europe new mass movements of Catholic laity, from French proto-fascist groups like Action Française (and the more respectable Catholic Action movement of the 1930s) to the Centre Party of Weimar Germany. There is another response - the bureaucratisation of the workers' movement, which tends to subordinate it to the bourgeoisie. The middle class is crucial on both sides, providing the foot soldiers for bourgeois mass organisations and the administrative elite of the bureaucratized workers' organisations.

Subordination to the bourgeoisie means subordination to the state, and therefore complicity in inter-state competition. Support for imperialism is support for favourable conditions, for small businesses in the metropole and for workers' organisations involved in corporatist administration. But imperialism itself has a time limit: industrial capacity in the metropole atrophies, thanks to the dynamics of global finance, new competitors arise and oppressed peoples gather the confidence to throw off the shackles. The end result is the sort of low-wage, low-productivity economy described by Jäger, frequently dependent for that reason on large inward migration. Pro-imperialism of this sort usually eats itself; but, if not seriously opposed by the revolutionary left, it is liable to be replaced by a more thoroughgoing anti-migrant chauvinism.

Which brings us to Kimber's mid-1970s, and the all-out assault on the workers' movement that in this country gets the name, 'Thatcherism'. The centripetal force of mass organisation is broken, and the result at the level of ideology is atomisation, nihilism and despair. At this point, the way is decisively open for the free manipulation of workers, lumpenised ex-workers and petty bourgeois by the "lumpencommentariat".

### Wrong, wrong ...

Given this background, it is clear that the political conclusions drawn by our exemplary leftwing voices are wrong.

The SWP approach of building a broad anti-racist movement on totally minimal politics merely adopts the politics of the liberal bourgeoisie, but this means silencing the essence of revolutionary socialist politics: our open disloyalty to the state. The SWP opposes a stronger Online Safety Act in its paper, but in its *practice* it all but demands one, because its practice involves giving platforms to people who openly support stronger speech controls under condition that the SWP is forbidden from denouncing them. It thus tends to propel the cycle that generates far-right ideology. The same problem is evident in Webbe's contribution, where she cannot in the end decide if she wants a movement of "class solidarity" or "of the many, not the few".

It is not clear what Seymour thinks should actually be done, but his insistence on analysing this phenomenon purely in terms of American-style critical race theory - "wages of whiteness" and all - implies precisely the identitarianism of that movement, and therefore merely the promotion of *different forms* of sectionalism. It is, therefore, equally powerless in the face of the overall political-ideological dynamics.

This leaves SPEW and Jäger. Like Seymour, Jäger is cagey about explicit political proposals, but his identification of austerity as the primary cause of vulnerability to pogromist ideology invites counterfactuals to the years of austerity, of what could otherwise have been done in these lost years. With SPEW, it is quite explicit - the answer is a programme of bread-and-butter, social democratic reforms, coupled with strengthening the

trade unions. Once we put things in terms of the irreducible dynamics of capitalism, however, it is plain that the bread-and-butter approach fails. What is possible is a function of global political and economic dynamics, and without a meaningful political force *openly* committed to the overthrow of the system, all momentary advances will merely terminate in defeat and disillusionment.

It is not that the existence of such an alternative will immediately convert rioters to the cause of international socialism. We are dealing, clearly, with acute political backwardness, and have enough work to do reorienting the labour movement before we have any chance with the *GB News* addicts. Nor does this long-term perspective absolve us of our defensive tasks in the present, as the success of counterprotests and physical defence of threatened people shows. It is rather that we need some way out of this death-loop, where the natural political cycle produces a periodic danger of chauvinist violence, and meanwhile drags politics as a whole to the right over time (as Labour tries to meet these famous "legitimate concerns" ... )

There is, bluntly, no way out that does not involve the wholesale rejection of the whole show - not just austerity, but the intrinsic corruption of capitalist politics: the stealth-disenfranchisement of the population by way of suborning or smashing their political organisations; the lamentable role of Britain in global economic and military affairs; total control of the media by billionaires and state organisations; the anti-democratic nature of the standing police force. This is not the job for a coalition of "the many", or a single-issue anti-racist campaign, or even (as SPEW seem to think) the trade union leadership, but a Communist Party ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

1. [socialistworker.co.uk/comment/the-crisis-of-far-right-violence-and-fascism-in-britain](http://socialistworker.co.uk/comment/the-crisis-of-far-right-violence-and-fascism-in-britain).
2. [morningstaronline.co.uk/article/problem-fascism](http://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/problem-fascism).
3. [www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/128637/14-08-2024/jobs-homes-and-services-for-all-smash-racism](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/128637/14-08-2024/jobs-homes-and-services-for-all-smash-racism).
4. [newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/dreaming-of-downfall](http://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/dreaming-of-downfall).
5. [newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/into-the-void](http://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/into-the-void).

## Fighting fund

# What is lacking!

Readers may recall that three weeks ago, in the issue just before our summer break (August 1), I reported that in July we had smashed through our monthly £2,250 fighting fund target, raising no less than £2,847. Just what we needed!

So what's the situation for the *Weekly Worker* in August? Well, I'm pleased to say that things are looking just as good for August - we already have £1,787 in the kitty, which means we are just £463 short of our target with 10 days still to go!

All this is very heartening, especially in a situation where we've been faced with a huge rise in costs - particularly for printing, but also for postage, etc. It looks inevitable that we'll have to increase our subscription rates later this year, despite the fantastic generosity of so many of our readers and supporters.

I won't list all the donations that have come our way over the last three weeks, but let me sum them up. Firstly, four comrades

came up with three-figure contributions, while a further six donated between £50 and £100. Twelve others contributed between £20 and £50, while the remaining 21 were for less, but only two of those were for under £10. Brilliant!

Thanks very much to every one of those 43 comrades, but now we need another couple of dozen to make sure we shoot past that target once again! Feel free to make a bank transfer or PayPal donation - or even send us a cheque! Go to the link below to see how.

We need our readers, just as they - not to mention the entire left - need the only paper that fights for what is so badly lacking: a single, principled, democratic Marxist party! ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)



## DEBATE

# Combat the far right online

Social media and encrypted messaging are being used by the far right to shape politics. How should the left respond? **Carl Collins** thinks we should consider throwing away our leaflets and take to our keyboards

Following the July 29 stabbings in Southport, when three children were murdered, every person remotely capable of rational thought and in possession of even the slightest dose of humanity would have felt their stomach sink and their hearts break. Shock, disbelief, anguish, confusion, anger would have been the instinctive feelings experienced from such traumatic news.

To a tiny group of people, however, if any of such feelings were to be felt at all, they were to be quickly pushed aside in favour of an overwhelming sense of opportunity. Far-right groups, networks, individuals and 'bots' (semi or fully autonomous software that communicates through social media using artificial intelligence or algorithms) immediately began circulating half-truths, conspiracy theories and outright lies about the attack and the alleged attacker.

It was initially claimed by *Channel3Now* - an American website which shares viral 'fake news' stories on social media - that the attacks were carried out by someone who had arrived 'illegally by boat', that he was on an 'MI6 watchlist' and that he was 'known' to mental health services. This calculated rumour, or variations of it, along with other lies, were systematically spread both autonomously and by prominent individuals across social media. As would be expected, vermin such as convicted fraudster Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (more commonly known as Tommy Robinson) and Andrew Tate, a misogynist and so-called social media 'influencer' who is currently in Romania facing criminal and civil charges of sexual assault and human trafficking, were quick to promote the lies. Nigel Farage, now an MP, took to social media to arrogantly 'ask questions' of the police, citing Tate's claims as his source of concern!

## Algorithms

As 'celebrities' and 'public figures' with large followings began to consciously or unconsciously share this content, the subsequent viewing and sharing by 'ordinary' accounts produced a self-amplifying spike in activity, aided by the algorithms which disseminate popular or coordinated content through social media. This means even people who do not follow such far-right groups, networks or individuals would have almost certainly seen some of this content in their feeds - despite the information being partially or sometimes entirely false. As the saying goes, a lie will be halfway around the world before the truth has got its boots on.

Nevertheless, politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum, and the right wing, having developed its internet engagement over several years, was ready and able to take the opportunity. This played a significant part in the subsequent riots which broke out across Britain. For those looking for justification for their racism, this was it, and the calls to take to the streets were answered. Other people, frustrated at any number of things - the cost-of-living crisis, housing shortage, strains on local infrastructure, etc - were able to read what they wanted into the slogan, 'Enough is enough', and joined in (however, when Farage *et al* say 'these people have legitimate concerns', although there is a kernel of truth, it suggests



**Benito Mussolini, October 1922: now his heirs and inheritors fight on Facebook**

only working class people are racist, which is absurd). People who are nothing more than thugs and looters also joined the riots, capitalising on the chaos and stretched emergency services. Encrypted messaging software, such as *Telegram*, were used to spread (mis)information and coordinate the main ringleaders of the riots.

Progressive and leftwing groups were able to organise a response and began to counter the far-right elements, some with admirable success. Although reliance on the police and the courts and calls for a clampdown on demonstrations and free speech are potential elephant traps, significant sentences have already been handed down to some of those participating in the riots, be it physically or online.

However, in response to the initial response by the police, courts and the left, the far-right used the internet and social media to begin a new phase - claiming that those arrests and counter-demonstrations were the result of 'two-tier' policing, claiming they were being unfairly discriminated against by the police (despite it being found to be 'institutionally racist'). The final stage, I predict, will be to highlight the custodial sentences as 'the establishment' trying to 'silence' or 'cancel' those wanting to speak 'the truth'. The online presence will continue, as a 'defensive' wave, ready to jump on any future opportunity that presents itself.

## What to do?

As a result of the riots and the counter-protests, questions are inevitably raised, such as whether what we are seeing is fascism, whether this rise of the right is different from those of the past, and what the response of the left should be. Without much hesitation I think we can dismiss any talk about the developing situation or the existing component parts - the groups, networks or individuals - constituting fascism.

There may well be quasi-fascist tendencies - such as the authoritarian

ownership of vital parts of the internet such as *Twitter* (now called *X*) - but, as has been outlined in these pages before, the incorrect application of the term 'fascist' (used by some as little more than a swearword against those they oppose) is detrimental to the debate needed on the left. And regarding what is termed the 'rise' of the far right, I am prepared to accept at this point that the antagonisms and conflicts which have centred around the concept of 'immigration' have existed for decades or even longer. I am therefore open to persuasion as to whether this is a 'rise' without precedent or is of the 'cyclical' or repetitive nature. As to the response the left should take, I believe one aspect which is deserving of more attention is the battle for the internet and social media.

We are seeing calls from MPs, the media, the police and judiciary, for more to be done to restrict potentially 'harmful' material from being circulated online and on social media, such as we saw in the period following the Southport attack. One path being explored is incorporating this into the Online Safety Bill, which was created predominantly to address the issue of child pornography and grooming online. For obvious reasons, the left should be wary of such legislation being extended to include 'harmful' political material. Whilst some may welcome it being used to counter the far right, the bill would be utilised with even more ruthlessness against a revolutionary left movement threatening the capitalist system as a whole.

The far right is currently years ahead of the left regarding social media engagement. Throughout the Brexit referendum, then Covid, and now in the political movements around the world, which have seen members of far-right organisations win seats at all levels of government and administration, they have been able to refine their online tactics to engage with all users of the social-media platforms, not just those looking for their content.

What we are talking about is not just a few skinheads furiously punching hateful bile into their keyboards - or even a few expensive-suited, opportunist politicians regurgitating rhetoric around immigration to their followers. We are talking about well-funded, highly sophisticated technology, operated by digital experts and strategists, creating a highly effective digital propaganda machine and complex techniques to engage with and influence global politics.

## Anti-establishment

During the Covid pandemic, for example, the general message from the right was not the expected one about 'immigrants bringing disease' and such - although such idiocy could be found - but was the highly orchestrated claim about being 'anti-establishment', 'pro-freedom', etc, which was calculated through digital analysis to be more affective to a wider number of people beyond the traditional far-right base.

Most notable, however, were the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US presidential election, where targeted political advertising was used, created using the mass harvesting of hundreds of millions of data points collected through social media interactions, in order for specific slogans and content to appear to particular groups of people in targeted areas. At the centre of the scandal were not members of Patriotic Alternative or some such far-right group, but the 'consultancy firm', Cambridge Analytica.

Whilst Russia and China are often offered up as the 'bogeysmen' of these tactics with accusations of 'hacking' and 'influencing' politics (with some justification, but in this case claims that *Channel3Now* has links to Russia have been found to be false), according to some reports, a greater amount of activity and finance - amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars - has in fact come from US Christian rightwing groups, attempting to influence international political movements (once again highlighting the global coordination

of the modern right wing). And just in case this is not enough to ensure they reach their targeted audience, trusted individuals such as Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk own whole social media platforms, with the ability to manipulate the algorithms which help determine what content is promoted or indeed suppressed.

## Public discourse

If you do not happen to be on any of the social media platforms, you could have been forgiven for thinking this conquering of the internet by the far right was of little significance up until the point where you saw thousands of rioters on the streets causing damage and fear. But, as I have tried to explain, this is just the more overt outcome of their digital dominance, to be carried out by the 'foot soldiers'. There are far more subtle, insidious results they achieve through this strategy.

As the 'traditional' media - particularly newspapers - continue to decline in popularity, those same outlets, owned by the same members of the ruling class, have moved online. In order to generate income, they now require visits to their website for the advertisers to pay them. In order to ensure they get that traffic, they are required to produce extraordinary content in order to be noticed by users scrolling their feeds. This leads to inflammatory headlines, which are in turn shared and circulated around the internet, as we saw with the lies about the Southport attacker. This in turn begins to affect the algorithms, which make such headlines ever-increasingly more present to users. These are then taken up by television and radio news programmes, maybe with some of the 'influencers' on to talk about the subject, and then politicians are asked to comment and create policy, ultimately affecting political and public discourse. After all, it must be the 'will of the people', given how popular it is on social media!

How the left engages with the internet and social media from the back foot on which we find ourselves is difficult to propose. I am by no means a technophobe, but equally I am no digital expert. Direct online intervention - countering individual rightwing networks and content - whilst worthwhile in some respects, is time-consuming, labour-intensive and very much on the micro-scale in today's digital landscape. Trying to force the algorithms to promote 'our' content is not impossible but very difficult, given the amounts of dark money being pumped into rightwing networks and the ownership of the social media platforms. Equally, what is called 'social listening' - the macro-scale collection and analysis of hundreds, thousands, even millions of data points - is for similar reasons impossible for individual organisations on the left. It is expensive, complex and can be morally questionable.

Despite the challenges created by the current ownership of the internet structures and social media platforms by the ruling class, who are at this stage prepared to allow its use by the far right, we may soon have to question whether the printing of thousands of leaflets for distribution at leftwing events is a realistic counter to the digital organising taking place with success by the far right. The left is simply not present in this particular battle. And, as I have said, nature abhors a vacuum. The right will occupy it permanently if we do not figure out how to ●



## TECHNO-FIXES

# Nature's gift to humanity?

It is neither particularly expensive nor particularly dangerous. Using nuclear energy is, though, essential if we are to enjoy a life of abundance and nature is to have room to flourish, claims Emil Jacobs

In the last issue of the *Weekly Worker*, Jack Conrad argues against a set of commonly proposed 'solutions' for dealing with climate change.<sup>1</sup> It is unclear what it is that he does want, and the piece is riddled with problems. In this reply I will focus on his arguments against nuclear energy in particular, but first I will put forward my reasons why it is impossible to ignore the nuclear option if we are serious about our goal to cut carbon emissions.

Humanity as a whole uses a dazzling amount of energy. In 2023 this was a total of 183,000 terawatt-hours (TWh)<sup>2</sup> - an amount that has been growing by around 2% a year.<sup>3</sup> If we project this into the future, it means energy usage will have doubled by around 2060.

A strong current on the far left is that of 'degrowth', which, apart from arguing for run-of-the-mill socialist policies like public transport and housing for all, is hard to pin down as a single monolithic and coherent ideology. But there appears to be a common theme: energy usage. Some degrowthers want to cut energy consumption by up to 95%!<sup>4</sup>

And there is a case to be made. That 183,000 TWh is *all* the energy we generate, also called *primary* energy. 76.5% of this primary energy is generated by burning fossil fuels. Most of this energy is lost as heat. So you can argue that primary energy will drop significantly, once we electrify many things, mainly in industry, as electricity has the potential to be vastly more efficient than burning fossil fuels.

To a degree it is a two-way street: hydrogen and e-fuels, needed for hard-to-electrify sectors like long-distance flights, need energy to be made, and suffer a big overall loss from creation to consumption - 30% efficiency for hydrogen, at best.<sup>5</sup> In the end, we are not quite sure what decarbonised energy consumption actually looks like for the amount we need, as many factors play a role. These factors are constantly shifting: eg, will we still want industry x, y or z by 2050? These are crucial political questions that need answering.

Then there is the crucial question of Africa: how will it develop? If we take China as a model of what to expect, the outlook is somewhat grim. China went through its industrial development during the last half of the 20th century, using primarily coal to fuel its industries. Africa has the same option, given the vast coal reserves mainly in South Africa and the low price of coal on the world market. This degrowth position then actually means that Africa cannot be allowed to develop in the same cheap way. Social imperialism in a new jacket.

Without energy, and all the possibilities it brings (mainly industry and most use-values in a modern society - smartphones, fridges, freezers, public transportation networks ...), there can be no development. Put stronger: there is no such thing as a low-energy, rich society anywhere on the globe.

Vaclav Smil offers something more tangible for us materialists, in what he calls the "four pillars of society"<sup>6</sup>: without cement, steel, fertiliser and plastic, the world would be a *very* different place. Yet these four ingredients of modern life are responsible for consuming 17% of global energy and producing about 25% of all emissions. Are we to deny



City of Pripyat, Ukraine: abandoned following the Chernobyl disaster - the stricken nuclear plant can be seen in the distance

cement, steel, fertiliser and plastic to Africa? What about other energy-intensive products, like glass, paper, chemicals, etc?

This is the crux of what we need to solve: we need clean energy, and lots of it, for a thriving society. This is both the case under capitalism and under socialism. Although we might be able to cut some industries and industrial processes utilising a socialist form of development, degrowth alone can hardly solve the climate crisis without complicating African development and cutting living standards significantly. Degrowthers are therefore wrong.

### Band aids

Renewable energy is often touted as the way forward to a zero-carbon future. However, many of the objections Jack makes against a "techno-fix" apply to it.

First, despite him saying that solar and wind are a lot cheaper than nuclear energy, that is not correct. They are only cheaper *from the perspective of an investor*. Let me explain. One way to rationalise costs is to calculate the levelised costs of energy, or LCOE. This is simply the costs divided by all the energy the respective energy source is going to produce over its lifetime.

Investment consultancy Lazard publishes updated LCOE numbers every year and for many years these numbers have been used by enthusiasts of renewable energy to prove that their wonderboy energy source is really cheapest. There is a catch, however.

In the latest LCOE report by Lazard the *firming* costs are included for the first time: "Firming costs reflect the additional capacity needed to supplement the net capacity of the renewable resource ..."<sup>7</sup> In other words, what do solar and wind cost, if we assume that society needs energy all day long, instead of only when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing?

In that case, Lazard puts solar at between \$126 and \$141 per MWh, and wind at \$115 to \$132 per MWh, both for the Californian grid. Meanwhile, nuclear is put at \$141 per MWh. This latter price is completely based on the rather expensive Vogtle

3 and 4 reactors that just came online in Georgia. So, if we include firming costs - which can be achieved by various technologies, but most often by natural gas plants - renewables and nuclear are at least in the same ballpark.

The point here is that LCOE in itself is a problematic figure, as it only looks at the cost of putting up a wind turbine or solar park. The rest - infrastructure, firming costs, decommissioning - is externalised. These costs are not small. In the case of the Netherlands, which has plans to put up 70 GW in wind turbines in the North Sea by 2050, we are talking about €1 billion per GW in infrastructure.

Due to the intermittent and decentral nature of solar and wind energy, a vast investment into the grid is also needed. For the Netherlands this is going to be €160 billion for the next 10 years,<sup>8</sup> and in the UK it will be £58 billion.<sup>9</sup> All these costs are going to be carried by the consumer or taxpayer - mainly working class households, of course.

Meanwhile, grids where nuclear is dominant tend to be a lot cheaper per kWh consumer prices compared to grids where renewables are dominant. For example, household prices in Germany (a country that phased out nuclear completely) are double that of France (which relies heavily on nuclear).<sup>10</sup>

Second, intermittency is actually a big problem. No factory in the world, including those making solar panels, runs on solar or wind energy. The best you get are so called 'certificates of origin', which is really just playing with numbers.<sup>11</sup> Factory machinery needs electricity *constantly*. A minor hiccup of mere milliseconds can be enough to shut it down, or even cause damage, with costs potentially soaring into the millions. Of course, you can run a gas plant next to it, but that is not a carbon-neutral solution and costs a lot to keep on standby. No wonder Germany is deindustrialising.<sup>12</sup> No industrial society can run on solar and wind alone without a reliable way of storing the energy generated.

Third, resources. Solar and wind are *low-intensity* energy sources. So you need a lot of wind turbines and solar

panels for a given amount of energy. For example, in the Netherlands there are around 3,000 wind turbines on land which generated 13.6 TWh in electricity in 2022.<sup>13</sup> This is slightly more than half the electricity Hinkley Point C in Somerset will generate, once it is completed.

Suffice to say that you need far less resources for nuclear energy compared to solar and wind.<sup>14</sup> After 20 to 30 years you will need to replace solar panels and wind turbines, for example. These can partly be recycled, but mining will be a necessity for a long time to come (mines, of course, are mostly located in the third world, where labour conditions are abysmal).

Nuclear energy has another trick up its sleeve: breeder reactors. In our capitalist market these reactors are still a niche, since there is plenty of cheap uranium, but they sport several huge advantages. For one, they *eat the nuclear waste*. Jack mentions the 24,000-years half-life of plutonium-239, but this is fuel waiting to be used, which could provide Europe with all its energy for many centuries.<sup>15</sup> No more mining needed and the actual waste left - so-called fission products, remaining radiotoxic for a mere 300 years - are tiny in volume and are easily managed. A far cry from the toxic mining tailings for solar panels that remain toxic and carcinogenic *forever*.

Fourth, quantity. This is not going to be a problem everywhere, but in many industrialised places, solar and wind simply do not deliver enough energy. Since I am most familiar with the Netherlands, I will once again use it as an example. Currently we use around 830 TWh (or 3,000 PJ if you want to put it that way) in total energy. As noted earlier, the government is aiming for 70 GW of wind energy in the North Sea and wants to electrify many things, so total energy consumption will drop to somewhere around 700 TWh. Assuming capacity factors are normal for offshore wind, these plans will deliver around 275 TWh in electricity annually. Basic arithmetic is enough to figure out that there is going to be a problem here, as we are missing a *lot* of clean energy in this picture. The options are: import or nuclear.

There is one trump card that solar and wind enthusiasts can play against nuclear energy: it is faster to deploy. Agreed. This is why I think we ought to deploy many solar and wind farms - despite the enormous costs, resources needed and impact on the environment - to lower our carbon emissions as fast as possible. In the longer term, beyond 2050, we can focus on steadily building more nuclear power plants, gradually replacing old solar and wind farms, when their time comes.

### Misguided

Let me move on to Jack's arguments against nuclear energy. First he mentions how building a nuclear power plant produces a "hell of a lot" of greenhouse gas emissions. True, but then they can run for 80 years or more. A better way to look at this is by lifecycle analysis. 'Our World in Data' has a handy chart,<sup>16</sup> based on numbers from the United Nations among others, putting nuclear energy firmly at the bottom of the chart for greenhouse gas emissions.

It takes a long time, says Jack - true again. But I would argue that

this is the wrong way of looking at it. What we *need* (and so far no western country has committed to this) is serialised build-outs, much like what France did in the 1980s with the Messmer Plan. You start building one unit, the following year you start building another, then the next year another ... You do not stop the commencement of new builds. The first decade you will not have any completed builds, but then ... As if by magic, you get a nuclear plant every year!

The individual build time can be long, but is irrelevant. The point is about mass production. This incidentally lowers costs immensely, as you gain experience building them and can use an already established supply chain.

### Decommissioning

The disposal of waste and decommissioning is a hidden cost, says Jack. Untrue. By law this cost is accounted for and part of the kWh price, being a fraction of a penny.<sup>17</sup> The owner of the plant thereby saves up for the eventual decommissioning.

"Spent uranium, though it has a relatively short half-life, kills quickly because it releases lots of radiation." I presume Jack is referring here to spent *fuel* with its fission products, which indeed are highly radioactive. We know this, and therefore we can handle it with the necessary care. These fission products need storage for around 300 years before they lose their radiotoxicity. We can do this, Jack.

"So why do various governments relentlessly pursue nuclear power?" Because, Jack, nuclear energy is the only scalable clean-power source that can deliver energy as we need it, is highly reliable, gives the option for geopolitical energy independence as you can store uranium for many years, has a tiny footprint, and delivers thousands of highly paid and secure jobs for local communities.

Nuclear energy has been nature's gift to humanity. We either embrace this gift and set our species on a path to an abundant life for all, with room for nature to flourish, or we reject it - to our own peril ●

### Notes

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**UKRAINE**

# Notes on the war

Ukraine's surprise attack on the Kursk oblast is a daring move, a military gamble, says Jack Conrad. It certainly exposes the one-dimensional thinking of Russia's high command



An icy Vladimir Putin consults with Alexei Smirnov, acting governor of Kursk oblast, about the situation following the incursion

My last 'Notes on the war' article was written back in April.<sup>1</sup> Why the four-month gap? Well, frankly, till now nothing unexpected, nothing significant, has happened ... except, of course, the continuation of grief, death and hell. Russia's widely predicted summer offensive geared up on schedule as the heavy spring rains came to an end and the ground began to dry out under the warm sunshine. But there were no big breakthroughs, no strategic gains. Instead, Russia's forces pulverised their way forward, inch by inch and village by village, on both the southern and eastern fronts. Slivers of territory, even on large-scale maps.

Millions of artillery shells have been fired off, along with tens of thousands of glide bombs, missiles and kamikaze drones. That and mines and human-wave tactics have sent who knows how many more to an early grave in the name of 'Glory to Ukraine' on the one side and 'All glory to Russia' on the other. Estimates are that to date around 500,000 have died.<sup>2</sup> Such is the cess of war.

Now, though, we have Ukraine's Kursk offensive. Preliminary softening-up operations seem to have begun in late July with airstrikes. But the decisive move happened on August 6, with Ukrainian armoured brigades smashing through the border and then, backed by auxiliary units, advancing deep into Russian territory at speed. We are told that around 1,200 square kilometres and 92 settlements have been taken. Ukraine also boasts of holding 2,000 Russian POWs, knocking out arms dumps and destroying three key bridges ... thus hampering any incoming Russian reinforcements.

Vladimir Putin has appointed Alexei Dyumin to head what he calls Russia's "counter-terrorist" response. This is important for three very different reasons. Firstly, while Dyumin has a military background, he also served in security, briefly acting as Putin's chief bodyguard, and as of now he is the secretary

of the state council. Secondly, this could be the making or breaking of Dyumin as a potential successor to the president. Thirdly, there is still no official admission that Russia is fighting an actual war with Ukraine.

Putin is probably right not to trust the judgment of his top military staff. When Ukraine's Kursk offensive began and succeeded with such rapidity, I readily admit to being more than taken aback. Since the second phase of the war - that is, after the failure to capture Kyiv - Russia has been digging tank traps and trenches, putting in place dragon's teeth and minefields and fighting from incredibly well defended positions. Indeed, not least having looked at the open-source satellite pictures, I wrote of multiple Russian layers of fortifications, running 1,000 kilometres along the whole of the southern and eastern fronts, the Surovikin line ... but from there onwards, up the entire Russian-Ukrainian border all the way to the north and Belarus.

Was I wrong? No, definitely not. Consulting the daily reports issued by the hawkish, though usually reliable, Institute for the Study of War think tank, I find two lines of Russian "field fortifications" clearly marked on their Kursk maps, but, when it comes to Ukraine's salient, they are now, of course, way behind the combat zone.

So how come Ukraine's forces could break through in the north-east in the summer of 2024, when they abysmally failed to do the same in the south during the summer of 2023? The main answer probably lies in military incompetence. There was no way Ukraine was going to break through the Surovikin line in a frontal attack. No, not even with those newly delivered Abrams, Leopard and Challenger tanks. As I wrote at the time, the idea of Ukrainian troops pushing south all the way down to the warm waters of the Azov Sea was always a complete non-starter.

Now, though, the military incompetence is entirely on the

Russian side. After success in capturing Bakhmut and Avdiivka and the grinding forward momentum on the southern and eastern fronts, the Russian high command seems to have succumbed to 'victory disease'. Months of constant Ukrainian retreats have led them to "arrogance" and a belief that they, the Russians, are "nearly invincible".<sup>3</sup> The idea that the Ukrainians could do anything daring, anything unexpected, simply did not occur.

## Victory disease

Hence, because of victory disease, Russian forces manning the north-eastern defence lines consisted of nothing more than poorly equipped FSB border troops, barely trained conscripts and a few Chechen odds and sods. Here was Russia's soft underbelly - an opportunity for the taking. All Ukraine's generals - and their western advisors - had to do was to carefully arrange for the inconspicuous movement of men and material, impose a strict regime of silence and pick their moment. On August 6 plans turned into action.

Nonetheless, how Ukraine almost effortlessly carved through Russian defence lines still remains something of a mystery for me. I have found no worthwhile military or journalistic accounts about the initial operation, apart from the build-up and the surprise element. Mostly there is pap and crap about Ukrainian forces 'walking in' and Russian forces 'running away'. What we do know, however, is the speed and depth of Ukrainian advances then on after.

Why did Volodymyr Zelensky give the green light to the Kursk operation? He certainly wants to divert Russian forces from the southern and eastern fronts, where Ukraine is undoubtedly on the back foot. In particular, Russian troops are moving to take Toretsk and Pokrovsk - "two of the hubs" of the Donetsk oblast.<sup>4</sup> After securing the small town of Nui-York they are now just six miles from the outskirts of Pokrovsk. If the whole of the Donetsk oblast can be secured in

2024, then in 2025 we might well see a determined Russian push towards Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, in the north-east and/or Odessa in the south-west. Taking Odessa would all but landlock Ukraine, meaning a strategic victory for Russia by giving it effective control over the entire northern Black Sea coastline. But, at the present snail's pace advance of Russian forces, that could quite conceivably take the war not into 2025, but into the next decade.

Of course, Kyiv had to divert its own troops with the Kursk operation. In this case 10,000 men in elite mechanised brigades, along with artillery, air defence and drone and reconnaissance support. Hence various commentators, including Russian media outlets, and their claims about Ukraine falling into a "trap" set by Putin, risking precious personnel and resources and overextending supply lines.<sup>5</sup> The idea of a trap appears to be complete nonsense as far as I am concerned. Putin is no military genius. What has happened is altogether more prosaic. Ukraine's war of position *momentarily* went over to a war of manoeuvre, and then, it seems, almost instantly flipped back again. A feature of the closing phase of World War I and mechanisation, and the use of tanks and aircraft.

Because there is no sign of large numbers of fresh Russian troops arriving in Kursk as reinforcements, at least at the moment, there arises the possibility, for Zelensky, of trading land for land in a future peace deal ... if the land can be held and if Donald Trump wins in November. Admittedly both big 'ifs'.

Noted, Ukrainian forces are already busily digging trenches - the Russians too. Industrial excavators are being used on both sides. Russian workers are reportedly being offered a daily pay rate ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 roubles (£45 to £60). When asked, recruiters readily "acknowledged the hazardous nature of the work".<sup>6</sup> There will be incoming artillery shells and drones hovering overhead ready for the kill. It will be the same

with Ukrainian workers.

Putting in place strong defences would, however, allow Ukraine to radically reduce its force commitment in Kursk and return to siege warfare ... this time, though, within the sacred territory of mother Russia itself. A huge blow to Putin's prestige, an outrage for Russian nationalists of all stripes and a tremendous morale boost for Ukrainian-Ukrainians.

True, Ukraine's units could advance much further into Kursk - but that seems unlikely. Then again, while the trench network remains incomplete, while that window of opportunity lasts, Russia could strike back in the next couple of weeks and send the Ukrainians packing ... back ten miles to the international border and perhaps beyond into the Sumy oblast (over which Russia has no territorial claim). However, the more trenches and tank traps that are dug and the more minefields and dragon's teeth put in place, the less likely is such an outcome. Instead, as with other fronts, Russia will have to grind forward and suffer significant losses.

## Defeat disease

Inevitably, in the west, there has been much excited hot air spouted by establishment outlets - announcing that Kursk marks a "turning point", that the Russian army is "on the brink, as discipline crumbles"<sup>7</sup> and that Putin's regime is "on notice".<sup>9</sup> News management, doubtless, but not without effect. Within Russia there are rumblings. Some pro-war public figures openly worry about failure in Ukraine: "We could lose if such blunders continue," said filmmaker Karen Shakhnazarov, appearing on the *Rossiya 1* TV station. "This isn't scaremongering. It's just an absolute understanding of the price that we and our motherland will have to pay," he concluded.<sup>10</sup> There are many others suffering from 'defeat disease'.

My expectation, for what it is worth, is that the Russo-Ukrainian war has a long way to run. It is a war



of attrition and neither Russia nor Ukraine show any sign of scoring a military victory or suffering a military collapse. A Trump victory might change things; on the other hand, it might not. It is not hard to imagine Trump and Putin failing to clinch the deal. There will be advances and reversals, towns will be lost and regained, land taken and retaken. Russia has every reason *not* to surrender though - and that is what Ukraine and its Nato backers are demanding (ie, Russia gives up every inch of territory, including the strategically important port city of Sevastopol in Crimea). Nor would an Alexei Dyumin, or a Dmitry Mironov, or an Andrei Belousov replacing Putin change things. Putin is not the regime, he fronts the regime.

So what are Russia's war aims? 'DeNazifying Ukraine' was always a chimera. There are outright Nazis in Ukraine and plenty of fascists too - not least the Banderites, who are now thoroughly incorporated into its armed forces: eg, the Azov Brigade. But neither it nor the broader Azov movement dominate the commanding heights of the army, of politics, the bureaucracy or the economy. And there are, of course, not a few fascists, red-brown nationalists and occult nutters on Putin's side too.<sup>11</sup>

Nor is the claim that Putin acted to save the Russian national minority in Ukraine from genocide in any way convincing. Yes, before February 24 2022, there was increased Ukrainian shelling along the line of control in the Donbas and discrimination against Russian speakers - even cases of savage persecution and murder. But talk of genocide in Ukraine has as much truth to it as talk of genocide against the Uyghur population in China.

Then there is the stuff about Ukraine not being a 'real' nation. A claim regularly trotted out by Putin and other Kremlin insiders: "Ukrainian identity does not exist and never has" (former president and prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev<sup>12</sup>).

Perhaps the original Slavic root of the term, 'Ukraine', meant 'borderlands' - interesting, but nothing more. Marxists will investigate the Norse origins of the Kievan and Muscovite Rus states, the religious-ideological influence of the Byzantine empire, the impact of the Mongol invasion, the expansionism of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Brest-Litovsk treaty, etc. However, what really matters, is not cod Russian history: rather what the mass of Ukrainians actually think *today* - and they surely think of themselves as fervently Ukrainian. That for us is what decides whether or not there is a Ukrainian nation - a historically constituted people, which occupies a common territory, speaks a common language and is united by a common economic life.

So what were and what are Russia's *real* war aims?

We take seriously enough the goal of "decommunisation", which, presumably, means rejecting the Bolshevik commitment to national self-determination and federalism that gave birth to *modern* Ukraine. Instead of using salami tactics and slowly extending direct Russian power over the whole of Donetsk and Luhansk, establishing a Kharkiv people's republic, etc, Putin ordered a full-scale military invasion. Whether that was intended to capture Kyiv and put in place a puppet regime, achieve the unity of all the peoples of medieval Rus by taking the entire country, or forcing negotiations which would end with a much diminished, neutral Ukraine and a Greater Russia, is an open question.

As the old saying goes, all initial military plans are abandoned with

the "the first encounter with the enemy's main force" (Helmuth von Moltke<sup>13</sup>). So, whatever the original intentions, Putin now has his Greater Russia, but hardly a neutral Ukraine. Shorn of nearly a fifth of its territory, Ukraine is a heavily armed candidate member of an expanded Nato (now including Finland and Sweden).

### Self-determination

Strangely, given the overt anti-communism of the Putin/FSB regime, there is a pro-Kremlin left. Without doubt the most prominent organisation here is George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain - now amicably divorced from the Brarite CPGB (Marxist-Leninist). Others in the same camp include the New Communist Party and, presumably, the equally near moribund Socialist Labour Party (still formally led by that sad ghost from the past, Arthur Scargill). Besides them there are various and many micro-Trotskyite groups, including groups of one, who likewise paint Putin as some kind of an anti-imperialist champion.

Naturally, since the initial phase of the 'special military operation' there has been more or less constant talk from amongst this bloc of a pending Russian victory and Ukraine's army being on the verge of defeat. The reasoning is simple - too simple. Ukraine does not have enough men of fighting age, its army has been denuded by death and injury, and patriotic young men no longer rush to join the ranks.

There is, admittedly, an element of truth here. However, what the pro-Kremlin left wilfully avoids, downplays and ignores is Ukrainian national sentiments, even Ukrainian national fanaticism. War has a psychological element, which, given the right conditions, can prove to be the *main* determinant.

Surely, Ukrainian-Ukrainians were never going to meekly accept the invasion of their country. Say, if Kyiv had fallen in the spring of 2022, there was always going to be a determined, bitter, unrelenting struggle against foreign domination. There would have been plenty of volunteers too.

As might be expected, the legitimacy of Ukraine as a nation goes denied or is dismissed with philistine contempt. But, if Putin is right about anything, it was, yes, Lenin and the Bolsheviks who gave birth to *modern* Ukraine.

So, let us put the record straight, beginning with a brief quote from Christian Rakovsky, chair of the council of people's commissars of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic between 1919 and 1923. Paying tribute to Lenin in 1924, following his untimely death, Rakovsky said this about him:

He was the most ardent adherent to the real equality of nations, not only during his pre-revolutionary activities, but also during his work as head of the Soviet government. It is due to his firm leadership that the old Russian empire, which was previously strangling scores of nationalities, has now been transformed into the Union of independent autonomous republics.<sup>14</sup>

Next an extract from the November 21 1919 draft resolution of the central committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) written by Lenin: 'On Soviet rule in the Ukraine' (agreed by the central committee and later endorsed by the 8th All-Russia party conference).

1. The CC, RCP(B), having discussed the question of relations with the working people of the

Ukraine now being liberated from the temporary conquest of Denikin's bands, is pursuing persistently the principle of the self-determination of nations and deems it essential to again affirm that the RCP holds consistently to the view that the independence of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic be recognised....

3. In view of the fact that Ukrainian culture (language, school, etc) has been suppressed for centuries by Russian tsarism and the exploiting classes, the CC RCP makes it incumbent upon all party members to use every means to help remove all barriers in the way of the free development of the Ukrainian language and culture. Since the many centuries of oppression have given rise to nationalist tendencies among the backward sections of the population, RCP members must exercise the greatest caution in respect of those tendencies and must oppose them with words of comradely explanation concerning the identity of interests of the working people of the Ukraine and Russia. RCP members on Ukrainian territory must put into practice the right of the working people to study in the Ukrainian language and to speak their native language in all Soviet institutions; they must in every way counteract attempts at Russification that push the Ukrainian language into the background and must convert that language into an instrument for the communist education of the working people. Steps must be taken immediately to ensure that in all Soviet institutions there are sufficient Ukrainian-speaking employees and that in the future all employees are able to speak Ukrainian....

Regarding it as beyond dispute for every communist and for every politically conscious worker that the closest alliance of all Soviet republics in their struggle against the menacing forces of world imperialism is essential, the RCP maintains that the form of that alliance must be finally determined by the Ukrainian workers and labouring peasants themselves.<sup>15</sup>

### Great Russians

Finally, another excerpt, this time from Lenin's 'Letter to the workers and peasants of the Ukraine apropos of the victories over Denikin' published in *Pravda* on January 4 1920:

... we Great-Russian communists must repress with the utmost severity the slightest manifestation in our midst of Great-Russian nationalism, for such manifestations, which are a betrayal of communism in general, cause the gravest harm by dividing us from our Ukrainian comrades...

And what the bourgeoisie of all countries, and all manner of petty bourgeois parties - ie, "compromising" parties which permit alliance with the bourgeoisie against the workers - try most of all to accomplish is to disunite the workers of different nationalities, to evoke distrust, and to disrupt a close international alliance and international brotherhood of the workers. Whenever the bourgeoisie succeeds in this, the cause of the workers is lost. The communists of Russia and the Ukraine must therefore be patient, persistent, stubborn and concerted effort foil the nationalist machinations of the bourgeoisie and vanquish

nationalist prejudices of every kind, and set the working people of the world an example of a really solid alliance of the workers and peasants of different nations in the fight for Soviet power, for the overthrow of the yoke of the landowners and capitalists, and for a world federal Soviet republic.<sup>16</sup>

### Grand strategy

Were we wrong, when it came to originally assessing the likelihood of an invasion? Yes, of course. But we have never claimed any unique insight into Kremlin thinking. And, quite rightly, along with countless others, we do not trust the US and UK governments. Truth is the first casualty - even before the outbreak of war. No-one should forget the lies told about there being no Anglo-French collusion with Israel after the 1956 attack on Egypt; the US lies about the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, which sparked the Vietnam war; the lies about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction in 2003; the lies about how Muammar Gaddafi's army was about to slaughter the entire half-million population of Benghazi in 2011. Etc, etc. It is certainly more than right to maintain a sceptical attitude to the dominant narrative (even if particular claims turn out to be true).

No less to the point, why did we doubt the claims coming from the Pentagon of an imminent full-scale Russian invasion? Because militarily, while it was quite conceivable that the Russian army could successfully drive all the way to Kyiv, we doubted that Ukraine could be taken or held in submission. Ukraine 2022 was no Czechoslovakia 1968 or even Hungary 1956. If an analogy is to be drawn, it would be with Afghanistan 1979. Even then the Soviet Union had the Afghan government, army and ruling party onside (well, that is after executing Hafizullah Amin and 97 other leading Khalq cadre). Hardly the case with Ukraine. Economically and socially it is much more advanced than Afghanistan, but the mass of the population - the 18% Russian minority aside - seems equally resolved to resist the invaders.

Surely Putin's generals would have told him what to expect, and that explains why we thought - and still think - that a full-scale invasion risked creating a quagmire and potentially a regime collapse in Russia. So why did Putin give the go-ahead? The answer lies in US grand strategy.

Ever since the February 2014 Maidan coup successfully overthrew the elected president (the 'neutral' Viktor Yanukovich) and installed a pro-western regime, Ukraine has been firmly placed in the American orbit. Constitutionally Ukraine is now committed to Nato and the European Union. Through a membership action plan it is an associate Nato member, it is armed by Nato and, in effect, acts as a Nato proxy. But, *quid pro quo*, as a result of the Maidan coup there were widespread disturbances in the Russian-inhabited south and east of Ukraine, and the Kremlin swiftly moved to annex Crimea and back the Donetsk and Luhansk breakaways.

Levering Ukraine into the so-called 'western camp' neatly fitted into a US grand strategy that can be dated back to Jimmy Carter's 1977-81 administration. In place of the cold war policy of 'containing communism' there came the doctrine of 'rollback', mapped out by his national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Ideologically this went hand-in-hand with 'human rights' and spreading 'democracy'. Not insignificantly, Brzezinski's famous book, *The great chessboard*,

envisaged a "loosely confederated Russia - composed of a European Russia, a Siberian Republic and a Far Eastern Republic".<sup>17</sup> In short, three pliant US neocolonies.

What Carter began, Ronald Reagan completed. After the 1989-91 collapse, both Nato and the EU were pushed further and further to the east, all the way to the borders of Russia itself. Joe Biden's flat rejection of Putin's call for a Nato reset and the Finlandisation of Ukraine doubtless made up Putin's mind about staging a full-scale invasion. So did warnings that any Russian military actions on Ukrainian territory would trigger crippling western sanctions - after all, Russia was already in occupation of Crimea and backed the Donetsk and Luhansk semi-states. In effect Putin was given an impossible choice. Either humiliatingly withdraw Russian forces from all of Ukraine or face sanctions. Boxed in, Putin went for broke.

However, in terms of grand strategy, February 24 2022 played directly into US hands... championing Ukraine should certainly be seen as a continuation of Carter's rollback doctrine. Ukraine serves as the equivalent of 'poor little Belgium' or 'plucky little Serbia' in World War I. Not only could warmongers - Biden, Harris, Blinken, Stoltenberg, Von der Leyen, Johnson and the rest - front the widespread moral outrage over Ukraine (part real, part manufactured): at a stroke, the US made Italy, France and crucially Germany dependent on oil and gas supplies, over which it, the US, exercises ultimate control. Any idea of a Franco-German united Europe vanished with February 24 and the subsequent sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 Baltic pipelines in September 2022 (the recent *WSJ* report claiming that the whole operation was concocted on a "drunken" night out by a "handful of senior Ukrainian military officers and businessmen" and then carried out from a small rented yacht seems highly improbable to me - yet another attempt at deception<sup>18</sup>).

If he is elected, if he is not stopped by Kamala Harris - or, failing that, a Democrat-army-deep state coup - Trump could easily decide to continue the proxy war in Ukraine as part of the drive to block America's only full-spectrum challenger for world hegemony: ie, the People's Republic of China. After all, with the 'no limits' alliance, Putin has effectively constituted Russia as China's Austria-Hungary.

Either way, the US project of rebooting its imperial hegemony through surrounding and strangling China remains one of the few bipartisan areas of agreement in Washington DC ●

### Notes

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## COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

# Debating in urgent times

Against a background of a much expected Labour landslide, war in Gaza and Ukraine, the drive to encircle China and the looming threats of generalised nuclear exchange and climate breakdown, **Ian Spencer** and **Carla Roberts** report on this year's talks

It was Mike Macnair who opened CU 2024 on Saturday August 3 with a discussion of Lenin's *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* and the uses and abuses of the text over the years. Lenin's discussion of the role of the 'aristocracy of labour' and his debate with people such as Karl Kautsky was highlighted.

Many of the Trotskyist and other sects have an almost scriptural adherence to Lenin's text, which has led to the widespread calls for 'victory to' whichever nation can be portrayed as 'anti-imperialist', such as the Houthis of Yemen. This has proved to be a tactical failure. While the tasks of communists in imperialist countries may not necessarily be the same as those in subordinate countries, our principal objective is to win the working class to communism rather than entering alliances with reactionary regimes.

The Labour Party's recent 'loveless landslide' provided the focus for an analysis of the parliamentary outcome by Jack Conrad. With four million votes for the Reform Party and nine million for the Tories, the left can take little comfort from the low turnout in the election and a large majority for Labour, despite having only 34% of the vote. The effect of the Israeli assault on Gaza can be seen in the election of five 'independents', most of whom have no perspective on working class politics.

Only the Workers Party of Britain gained a significant number of votes, when it came to those declaring support for working class aims. Jack argued that, while the WPB is not the principled party that we need, it has to be regarded as part of the left. In other words, those who opposed a vote for Galloway, such as the Socialist Workers Party, often did so as a result of their bitter experience in Respect. Initiatives such as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and the Revolutionary Communist Party gained an insignificant vote. While many on the left continue to tail-end liberalism or support Labour, there is an urgent need for a mass Communist Party and, given the climate crisis and war, we do not have the luxury of time.

The importance of learning from history was stressed by Ben Lewis the following day. He gave a fascinating account of the positions taken by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. The tendency has been to see the war as a prelude to the Paris Commune and ignore the important struggles taking place before the war on both sides. This, of course, foreshadowed the catastrophe of World War I. Liebknecht regarded Bonaparte as a "cornerstone of reaction", but still opposed the war in a principled way and, along with Bebel, abstained on war credits in the Reichstag. Both went on to use their trials as a tribune for socialist ideas, despite opposition from many of their own social democratic comrades. In discussion, comrades explored the distinctions to be drawn between wars of national defence and those for annexation, so pertinent to the Ukrainian war today.

Since Engels' *Origin of the family, private property and the state* communists have seen the importance of anthropology. Chris



**Chris Knight: language**

Knight of the Radical Anthropology Group in his talk, 'Theories of language: how did we learn to speak?', stressed that as communists we take a scientific, dialectical approach, which applies to both the study of matter and of human behaviour and history. Chris gave an outline of the history of the topic, from the resistance to considering it by the Linguistic Society of Paris to the wide range of competing theories today. The importance of maternal development of shared childcare as a distinctive moment was stressed by Chris, who finished with a robust defence of Engels and his understanding of both the "origin of the family" and the "dialectics of nature".

### Gaza

Yasmine Mather and Israeli Marxist Moshé Machover gave their views on Israel's war of genocide and how to stop it. Yasmine opened by pointing out the potential significance of France and the US warning its citizens to leave Lebanon and how this might presage an attack by Israel on southern Lebanon. It is in the interests of Israel - and Netanyahu in particular - to have a wider war in the Middle East. It is also absurd to regard Hezbollah and Hamas as simply the proxies of Iran, especially as Qatar is the biggest supporter of Hamas. More important is the response of those on the 'Arab street' - many of whom are descended from Palestinians displaced in the original Nakba. The solution must involve the workers of the region, including the overthrow of the dictatorships of the region and Israel as the gendarme of the Middle East.

Moshé went on to analyse the prospect of endless war against the Palestinians and the contradictions in Israeli society. It is not accidental that the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, one of the Hamas peace negotiators, took place on Iranian territory. The aim was twofold: to scupper talks, while further provoking a response from Iran. Any successful attempt to win peace would see Netanyahu on trial for corruption and the failure of the Israel Defence Force to respond to the events of October 7.

In the debate that followed, comrades pointed out that it is also important that the Palestine Solidarity Campaign does not promote illusions in the 'axis of resistance'. Several comrades spoke about the importance of BDS as part of an overall strategy. Moshé, while agreeing that anti-Zionist Jews in Israel constitute a small minority, argued that they could not be written off and there must be a reason for the Israeli Jewish working class to support the dismantling of the Zionist state. Any attempt at a so-called two-state solution will be little more than the establishment of bantustans in Palestine.

In conclusion, Yasmine pointed out that, while the Palestine solidarity movement has been radicalised, without the involvement of the working class it is likely to fail.

### Key aspects

August 5 began with Ian Spencer's presentation on the centrality of health to communism. Marx and Engels not only wrote extensively on the damage to health by capitalism, but, more importantly, the concept of alienation and the recognition of health's significance in the full

realisation of human potential. This is a huge difference from official definitions as deviations from a statistical norm or the presence of pathogens.

He pointed to the flaws in the bourgeois sociology of health and how capitalism continues to damage it, despite overall improvements, particularly in developed countries. In the latter half of the presentation he focussed on mental health because it was an area which had been neglected by Marxists. Consequently, the critique of psychiatry tended to be either from the right or a kind of abstract humanism - the product of the 'new left' of the 1960s and 70s, which was a response to the stultifying effect of Stalinism. He mentioned, for example, the political abuse of psychiatry in the USSR.

In his talk, 'Fiction: utopian and scientific', Paul Demarty looked at utopianism in literature with particular reference to science fiction. From Thomas More's *Utopia* to William Morris and Ursula K Le Guin, Paul explored the richness of a range of writers who had 'utopian' ideas at the heart of their work and the impact of idealised notions of the future. Societies range from the ideal to the disturbingly dystopian. Many writers tried to address themes taken up by Marx, or the failure of the USSR to achieve a socialist society.

How Stalinism influenced art was complemented by how it influenced the nature of UK politics, argued Lawrence Parker in the following session. He gave a fascinating account of how Stalin had a direct effect on the official CPGB's programme, *Britain's road to socialism*. This was not only the programmatic statement associated

with the 'official communism' of the CPGB until its formal liquidation in 1991, but also extended beyond, into the wider labour and trade union movement. This includes Jeremy Corbyn's failure to lead the Labour Party to affect even modest change.

### Ireland

The following day Anne McShane reported on immigration and its impact on Irish politics in 'Creating illusions in a Sinn Féin government: opportunism and the Irish left'. The dramatic changes in Eire, particularly since the crash of 2008, have had a major impact on the standard of living for many of its five million population. From a country with a long history of net emigration, now immigration is seen by some as leading to a shortage of jobs and housing. Sinn Féin is playing the role of a left-populist party - which has led some, particularly in the SWM-led People Before Profit, to have illusions in a coalition with the nationalists. SF has *no* socialist perspective and even its supposed support for Palestine has not stopped its leaders getting together with Joe Biden in the US.

In the following session on August 6 the background of racism in the British context was given an interesting historical treatment by Ed Griffiths. Nineteenth century interest in the origins of a British 'race' were given a stimulus by artifacts found in archaeological sites and then correlated by measurements of living people by ethnologists such as John Beddoe, author of *The races of Britain*. In turn, this was linked to the work of linguists, who had noted the similarities between Indian and European languages. This was given



# What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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a powerful impetus by the growth of the British empire and the use of racism as an ideological justification for British imperialism.

The progressive nature of citizenship, against racial and feudal particularism, was then discussed by Bruno Leibold, author of *Citizen Marx*. It is sometimes overlooked that before Marx was a communist, he was influenced by the French Revolution and that important republican influences are clearly discernible in the works of both Marx and Engels - the critique of bourgeois republicans and proto-socialists played a significant role in the development of their ideas.

## International

Yassamine Mather began August 7 with her discussion on the 'War in Gaza: Iran, its "proxies" and the Iranian opposition'. Within Iran there is widespread opposition to the Iranian state and one of the consequences is that the regime's alleged support for Palestinians - which, after all, is part of the official ideology of Iran - is not believed by the masses.

However, Iran has gained credibility among some as the leader of the 'axis of resistance'. While largely unpopular, the government does have a base and the memory of the 1953 imperialist-organised coup continues to have a popular resonance. The reformist movement has support from within the ruling class, but concessions are intended to extend the life of the regime rather than to change anything fundamental. The royalist opposition to the regime is overtly hostile to the Palestinians, but it has little support - to the extent that even the USA is unwilling to back it. What always must be remembered by those who place any faith in the Iranian leadership is that one of the first things the regime did on taking power was to slaughter the Iranian left.

The importance of standing in elections - in the context of an expected Labour landslide - was stressed by Cat Rylance, who gave a report on her intervention in Manchester under the banner of Communist Future, which was a way of bringing together various non-aligned communists and leftwingers.

Useful experience in electoral politics was gained by participating in hustings, door knocking, negotiating the manifesto with others and aesthetic presentation. In discussion, some congratulated Cat on standing and the quality of Communist Future's material. Others were critical of the lowest common denominator approach and the failure to sufficiently highlight issues such as Nato's proxy war in Ukraine and the need for a mass Communist Party.

From Manchester to the United States: Parker McQueeney of the Marxist Unity Group - a faction of the Democratic Socialists of America - gave a report on how it should respond to the threat of a second Donald Trump presidency. The DSA saw rapid growth when Bernie Sanders was seeking the Democratic nomination, but has subsequently stagnated and taken a more apolitical turn. Trump has vowed to end the war in Ukraine even before his inauguration, but we have to remember he is a pragmatic politician. He is threatening deportations on a massive scale and comrade Parker argued that we are right to be concerned about a Trump re-election. Moreover, MUG needs to seriously think about what it will do if the state acts against it.

Continuing the theme of science in communist discourse, Marcus Strom gave a bravura performance on August 8, presenting a highly accessible account of quantum mechanics and the dialectical implications of this intriguing area of physics. The importance of motion in the understanding of the essential nature of matter was underlined and, more importantly, it makes no sense unless it is understood as a relation, he said.

Comrade Strom spoke very positively about the development of dialectical thought in physics, pointing out that JBS Haldane, who joined the CPGB in 1942, and Albert Einstein presented theories they understood to be inherently dialectical. While, of course, science has come a long way since Engels was writing on the topic and Lenin's *Materialism and empirio-criticism* was written as a polemic under particular circumstances, more recent developments in physics have added to, rather than refuted, their

fundamental assertions.

The claim of science in Marxism itself was further examined by Marc Mulholland, who gave a highly comprehensive historical introduction to the development of ideas of those often lumped together as the 'utopian socialists'. Marc was able to show that they were not merely utopian, but also "wonderfully critical socialists", to whom Marx owed some debt in the development of his own ideas.

## Science

The importance of motion in scientific ideas was stressed further by Thomas Nail, who revealed that an important contribution to understanding the developments of Marx's thought can be found in his doctoral thesis, which was on the *Difference between Democritean and Epicurean philosophy in nature*. The impact of classical scholarship on Marx and Engels is incalculable. However, Marx's thesis is somewhat neglected as an area of study. This is in partly due to the fact that it was not published in English until the 1970s in volume one of the *Collected works*, but it is of particular importance to an understanding of Marx's critique of mechanistic materialism.

Comrade Strom made a welcome second presentation to CU the following day, this time on the vital practical consideration of the Aukus - the alliance of Australia, the USA and UK - particularly with reference to "recruiting Australia to the US drive to encircle and strangle China". Marcus traced out how this came into being, particularly in the light of earlier opposition, which grew up following Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war.

Tina Werkmann, former chair of Labour Against the Witchhunt, posed the interesting question of 'Could Corbyn have ever taken power?', despite being opposed by the entire establishment, not to mention the right of the Labour Party and the pro-Zionist lobby. Her conclusion, echoed by the lively discussion, was:

It must have been clear to him and the advisors around him that, while he might have been able to *take office* for a few short weeks or months, he would not have been allowed to *take power*. Instead of using his position as Labour leader to radically transform and democratise the Labour Party and the unions, he wasted his tenure in the futile attempt to get into government - and chased unity with the right, at all costs.

We are now paying the price, she concluded, with freedom of speech, particularly around Israel/Palestine, being seriously curtailed across society.

Fittingly, this was followed by Moshé Machover, who discussed 'The ideology of Zionist colonisation'. He examined the mythical accounts of Yahweh promising the land of Israel to the descendants of Moses and how this is being used today, largely by secular Zionists, not only to dispossess the indigenous Palestinians but to justify mass extermination.

In a frank debate, participants argued about the need to try and win the Israeli working class to a wider, socialist, solution in the Middle East and the wider Arab world - not tailing Palestinian nationalism and its attempt to magic away Israel by calling it "the Zionist entity".

## Climate and party

In perhaps the most interesting and important session of the week, Jack Conrad introduced a discussion on August 10 on the 'Climate crisis, the limits of capital and the despotic dangers that lie beyond'. He outlined futile attempts to solve the impending climate catastrophe with technocratic

solutions and warned of "unintended consequences". He thought that the ruling class could possibly once again decide to "temporarily subordinate the law of value to the law of need to save capitalism", as it did during the Covid pandemic or during the two world wars. This is unlikely to stop the globe from heating up to levels incompatible with human life, while requiring huge attacks on our democratic rights, such as the right to strike, and standards of living.

Jack also argued against the popular idea of 'degrowth communism', outlining instead a positive vision for entirely *changing* production to fulfil human needs, and doing away with today's production for production's sake, which sees "do-gooders telling us with a straight face that they're doing their bit for the environment because they bought an electric vehicle. No, we need instead to restructure society from top to bottom and, for example, do away with individualised transport." He warned that, considering the level of destruction that has already occurred, "this is a task which won't happen from one day to the next, but could take a thousand years or so".

In the ensuing discussion, Mike Macnair raised the issue of migration, which is already deeply contested and which will increase due to the changing climate making many parts of the globe uninhabitable. "When peasant societies move towards capitalism, a clear demographic shift occurs, and people have fewer children." This has led to underpopulation in many capitalist countries, so that the ruling class "knows it needs migration - but paradoxically keeps arguing against it, for political reasons. This tension will massively increase." Summing up the discussion, Jack Conrad warned that "we really have no chance in hell without a real mass Communist Party".

In the final session, comrade Macnair outlined how, instead of building such a party, many left organisations continue to build "so-called popular fronts" and ends up subordinating themselves to the platform of petty bourgeois forces. This shows the ruling class that it is no danger to it, because it will remain loyal to the constitution and the armed forces. What is more, "These popular fronts always end up deeply unpopular."

His opening was followed by a useful discussion on the current rightwing protests, which lead many on the left to panic "that latent fascism is always there, just waiting to break out and take over". However, as comrade Conrad explained, "Tommy Robinson will not turn into Adolf Hitler, because capitalism currently has no need for fascism. Fascism is the inability of the ruling class to rule in the old way." In reality, "Today capitalism stands united behind the Labour Party" and there are no major divisions in the ruling class. Yes, he argued, "physical confrontations are sometimes necessary and, of course, we should defend ourselves and our meetings, but we should be honest and explain that there is currently no threat of fascism."

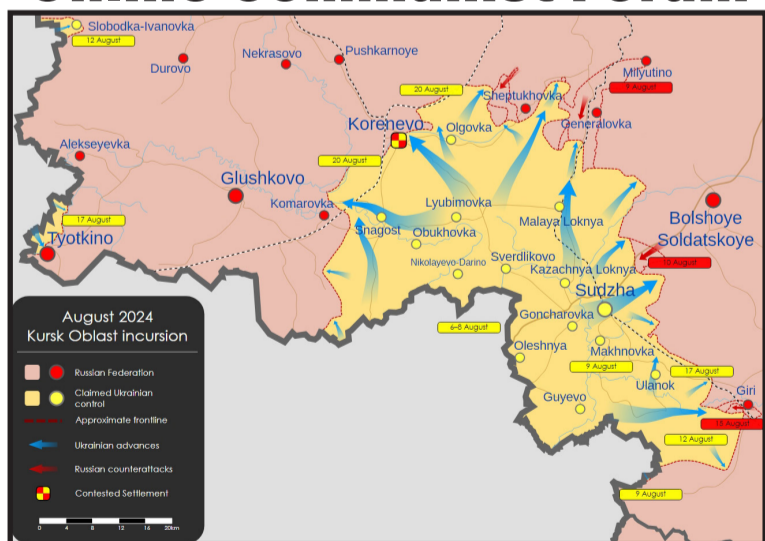
Almost 50 people attended CU sessions 'in person', while another 75 took part via Zoom and, as I write, well over 15,000 have already watched the livestreamed videos, which are still available on the CPGB's YouTube channel<sup>1</sup> and the *Weekly Worker's* Facebook page.<sup>2</sup> While Covid has changed the nature of meetings, it has also opened up their potential reach.

But one thing is certain: attending Communist University in person is an excellent experience ●

## Notes

1. [www.youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://www.youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain).
2. [www.facebook.com/weeklyworker](https://www.facebook.com/weeklyworker).

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday August 25 5pm  
Kursk in focus - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Use this link to register: [communistparty.co.uk/ocf](https://communistparty.co.uk/ocf)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](https://communistparty.co.uk) and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](https://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at [Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)



# weekly worker

State bans  
can never help  
the fight for  
socialism

## Fight ideas with ideas

Labour has vowed to crack down on 'hateful beliefs' associated with the far right and extreme misogyny. But what about anti-Zionism, asks **Eddie Ford**, which we are told equals anti-Semitism?

Following the rightwing riots in a string of cities and towns, with some calling for them to be officially designated as 'terrorist' incidents, it is hardly surprising that the natural response of the Labour government is to clamp down further on freedom of speech. Home secretary Yvette Cooper has vowed to crack down on people "pushing harmful and hateful beliefs", including "extreme misogyny", commissioning a "rapid review" of legislation that will essentially ramp up the Prevent strategy to stop people from becoming terrorist sympathisers or 'extremists'.

Telling us the last government's counter-extremism strategy was nine years out of date, Cooper wants officials to assess "the rise of Islamist and far-right extremism" alongside other "ideological trends" that have gained traction, with the intention of addressing "gaps in the current system" that leave the country exposed to harmful activity, which promotes violence or "undermines democracy" - or beliefs that fall under even broader categories like having a "fixation on violence". The home secretary particularly wants to locate the causes that lead young people to become 'radicalised' amidst the proliferation of "dangerous material" online, where you can encounter just about every idea imaginable. In this way, Yvette Cooper claims the government will deliver on its manifesto promise of preventing people from being drawn towards hateful ideologies and supposedly unBritish values.

As for universities, according to monitoring data published in June, the number of students flagged up under the programme has gone up by 50% in two years - with 210 Prevent cases in 2022-23 compared to 139 in 2020-21 - with "mixed, unclear or unstable" ideologies showing the biggest increase. Indeed, there has been a growing moral panic about the rise of social media 'influencers', such as Andrew Tate - something that may have pushed the government to think again and now consider misogyny as a form of extremism.

### Racism

The first thing to say is that to the defender of the status quo, all radicalism is by definition 'extremism' - 'twas ever thus. For communists, the fundamental task is bringing about socialist revolution, which means as a necessity delegitimising the status quo as far as possible. Hence we reject the right of the state to classify political outlooks as 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate', 'extremist' or 'non-extremist', let alone guilty of having a 'fixation' on violence. Name a state that has not deployed 'extremist' violence at some point in defence of its own class interests. However, communists are certainly 'extremists' when it comes to democracy, favouring maximal freedom of speech and association -



Yvette Cooper: dangerous 'British values'

rather than letting the dead hand of the bureaucratic state or corporate media decide what is beyond the pale.

Secondly, the latest proposals also have to be considered in the light of the ongoing Gaza protests - not just the riots that broke out in Southport, London, Hartlepool, Manchester, Rotherham, Belfast, etc. What Cooper is really talking about is referring more people to the intelligence services on the basis of *racism*. But, of course, after the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign that was highly effective and still ongoing, anti-Zionism itself is now classified as a form of racism. After all, a previous Tory home secretary, Suella Braverman, described the Gaza demonstrations as "hate marches" and, totally inverting reality, madly described the Metropolitan police as "biased" towards Palestinians and the left in general, as she agitated for a ban. Thus her comments on X about the "sick, inflammatory and, in some cases, clearly criminal chants, placards and paraphernalia openly on display" and, in the meantime, "week by week, the streets of London are being polluted by hate, violence, and anti-Semitism", where "members of the public are being mobbed and intimidated", while "Jewish people in particular feel threatened".

Under the current circumstances of Israel's war against the inhabitants of Gaza, plus the ever-present danger of escalation into a wider regional war with attacks on south Lebanon and Iran, it is not too difficult to imagine the home secretary introducing measures against anti-war demonstrations, under the pretext of moving against "harmful and hateful beliefs". Even more so when you remember the Prevent guidance was amended last year to include socialism, communism, anti-fascism - not to mention anti-abortion - in a list of potential signs of ideologies leading to terrorism.<sup>1</sup> In the section on the left, it states that socialism and communism are "united by a set of grievance narratives which underline their cause", implying sinister motivations. The threat to freedom of expression from such an approach is all too apparent.

Going into the land of make believe, we are meant to think that the cure for violence against women and girls is to clamp down on "extreme misogyny" - whatever that looks like. What is the difference between straightforward misogyny, or sexism, and "extreme" misogyny - how do you define it? Putting it mildly, we should be wary of all such legislation, which can easily be turned against us.

We know this from history - the classic example being the rightly lauded Battle of Cable Street in October 1936, which showed that there could be effective forcible resistance to the efforts to intimidate east London Jews from Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. But just a bit more than a month later the Public Order Act was introduced - in particular its notorious section 5, aimed at "threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour with intent to provoke a breach of the peace or whereby a breach of the peace is likely to be occasioned". The wearing of political uniforms was outlawed and police permission was needed to organise large meetings and demonstrations.

Though directed against the Mosleyites, the act was used extensively against the 1984-85 Miners' Great Strike, disputes with New Age Travellers, and protests during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. You may want a clampdown on the far right and Islamophobic racists organising genuine hate marches, but ultimately it will be the left that gets done. We will get prosecuted for being racist because we go out onto the streets of Britain protesting against the apartheid state of Israel and Britain's complicity with its crimes.

### Our rights

If you think this is exaggerated, there was an instructive case in Berlin a few weeks ago.<sup>2</sup> A court convicted a pro-Palestinian activist for leading a chant of the slogan, 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free', at a rally in the German capital four days after the October 7 attacks on Israel - the first trial in Germany centring on the use of that particular phrase. Ava Moayeri, a 22-year-old German-Iranian national apparently from a communist background, was ordered to pay a €600 fine, the court rejecting her argument that she meant only to express support for "peace and justice" in the Middle East.

The presiding judge said she "could not comprehend" the logic of previous German court rulings saying the phrase was "ambiguous", as it was clear to her that it "denied the right of the state of Israel to exist" and had to be evaluated in the context of "the biggest massacre of Jews since the Shoah - that is the elephant in the room". The judge also argued that the slogan was particularly harmful in Germany, which considers support for Israel to be a matter of *Staatsräson* (a 'reason of state'), at the core of its national identity due to its responsibility for the holocaust.

So there you are in the UK, taking part in protests against the genocide of the Gazan people and possible ethnic cleansing of the entire Palestinian people. Yes, *Zionist* Israel is an expansionist apartheid state that has no right to exist morally or politically in its current form, just as we on the left contended that

apartheid South Africa had no right to exist. At the time, the right of the Tory Party defended apartheid by arguing that if you got rid of white rule in South Africa, what you would get is the African National Congress, which was pro-Soviet. But, following the German example, will protesters in the UK now be prosecuted for chanting 'From the river to the sea' or saying that Israel has no right to exist as an exclusivist, racist, apartheid state?

### Even fascists

Equally, we in the CPGB have always been opposed to state bans on fascist organisations like Britain First and National Action. Of course, we find them utterly vile. But such legislation can easily be directed against the left and the working class movement, so by defending the right even of fascists to free speech, we are not indulging in a liberal sense of fair play - we are defending *ourselves*.

Communists are against imprisoning people for their political views, no matter how abhorrent. Only if they go around physically attacking other people on the basis of some twisted, anti-human ideology, should they be found guilty of assault, or murder in the case of the fascist, Thomas Mair, who murdered the Labour MP, Jo Cox. Or possibly attempted murder for those in Rotherham who took an active part in trying to burn down the Holiday Inn Express hotel housing asylum-seekers. Even then, the guiding principle should always be rehabilitation and where necessary treatment for mental health issues.

Fascist and reactionary ideas in general are best combated in the open - not by being driven underground by the state, where they will inevitably resurface, possibly in a more pernicious form. Especially in a context where the left has such a dismal record on freedom of speech, complicit for promoting a narrative that certain ideas simply need to be suppressed before they gain a hold over the sheep-like masses that need to be protected by an enlightened central committee. We shall never forget the Socialist Workers Party once telling us that only duly accredited students and specialist academics should have access to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* due to its corrupting influence.

We need to be aware that the threat to free speech does not come just from the right, from the likes of Suella Braverman and Liz Truss. It also comes from the likes of Yvette Cooper, from the German SDP government and their coalition partners, the Greens ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

1. theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/07/socialism-anti-fascism-anti-abortion-prevent-list-terrorism-warning-signs.
2. theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/06/german-court-due-to-rule-on-from-the-river-to-the-sea-case-in-test-of-free-speech.